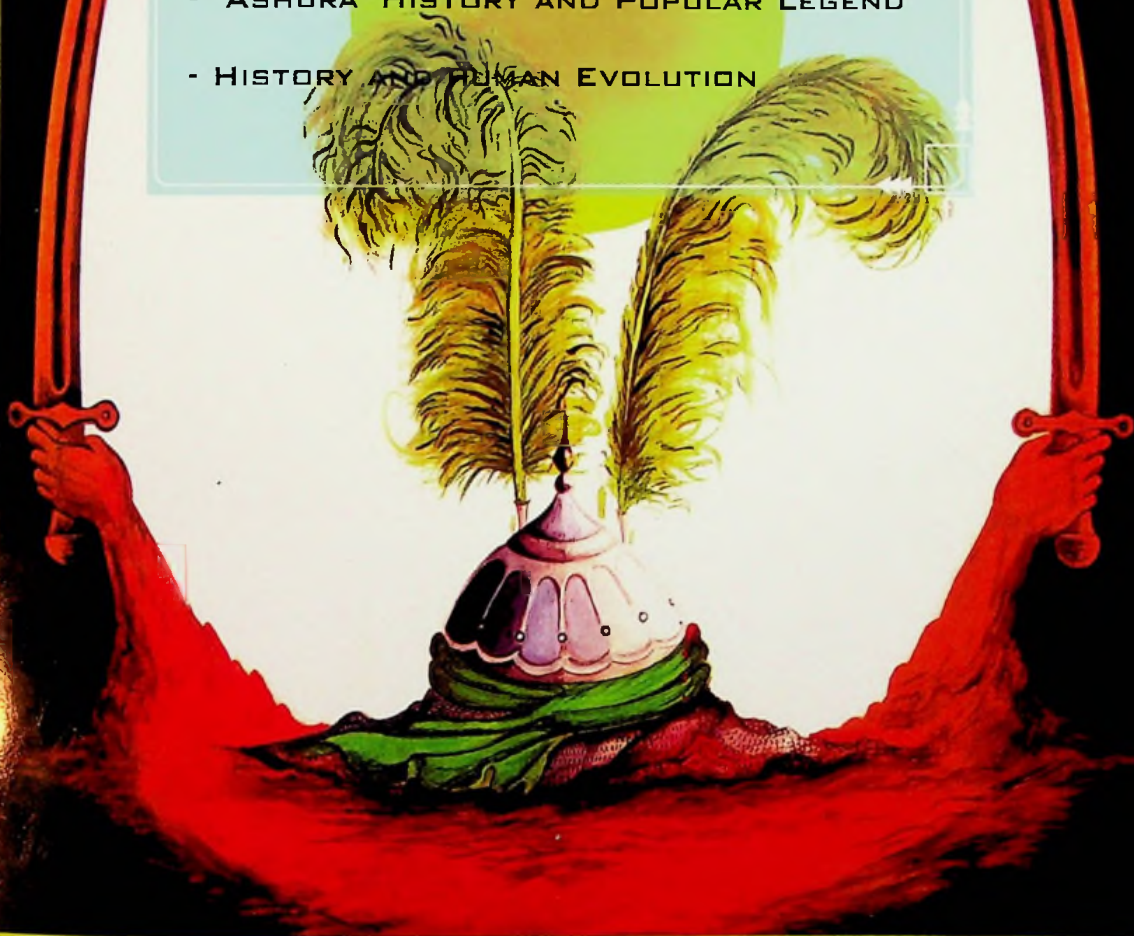


A Special Edition With Articles from Ustad Shaheed Mutahhari

# AL-TAWHID

- ETERNITY OF MORAL VALUES
- 'ASHURA' HISTORY AND POPULAR LEGEND
- HISTORY AND HUMAN EVOLUTION



Muharram 1424-March/April 2003



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# **Al-Tawhid**

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## **A Special Edition**

On this well-known month of Muharram when *Haq*\* showed itself to the world through the person of Imam Hussain (A.S.), we wish to print a special edition of AL-TAWHID and therefore share with you the blessings of this scared occasion.

It is also our objective in this special edition to reintroduce to you, our respectful readers, the master works of Ustad Shaheed Mutahhari a renowned scholar of Iran and the Islamic World.

We hope that the following articles will be of great benefit to all and will help in opening the doors of truth in regards to Islamic Thoughts.

**The Staff of Al-Tawhid**

**Muharram 1424 (March-April 2003)**

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## Eternity of Moral Values\*

*Ustad Shaheed Murtada Mutahhari*

*Translated from Farsi by A. N. Baqirshahi*

**B**efore entering the discussion concerning the eternity of moral values it should be noted that according to the philosophies of 'being' reality and knowledge as well as moral values are considered to be permanent. Though here I will not be concerned with the permanence of reality, but it is necessary to deal with the question as to why reality and ethics are dealt with separately. What is the difference between moral principles and other principles which we refer to as 'reality'? After all moral values

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\*. The original in Farsi, entitled "*Jawidanegi wa akhlaq*," appeared in a memorial volume *Yadnameh ye Ustad Shaheed Mutahhari* (Tehran: Sazman-e Intisharat wa Amuzish-e Inqilab-e Islami, 1360 H. Sh./[1981]).

also constitute certain principles and that which is said concerning scientific principles, that they are eternally true, should also apply to moral values. However, I also think that the right thing is to keep these two issues separate. But first of all I must refer to a minor issue to establish that the issue of eternity of moral values is very important for us and that it is closely related to the eternity of Islam.

Ethics comprises certain teachings, and if we believe the moral, humane, and social teachings of Islam to be transitory then the conclusion will be that the teachings of Islam dealing with morality and education are also subject to change. That is, it would imply that such principles had a validity in their own time, and with changes in conditions these moral principles should also change and so should the basic teachings of Islam. As a result the major part of Islam would be obsolete and should be abolished. Of course, the issue of evolution of reality is related to this matter, but the issue of relativity of moral values has a greater bearing on the eternity of Islam. Let us now proceed to clarify the point as to why the issue of ethics is separated from the issue of reality.

### **Speculative Wisdom and Practical Wisdom**

Reality relates to theoretical principles and ethics deals with practical principles. In other words, ethics is subsumed under practical wisdom (*hikmat-e amali*) and reality is subsumed under

theoretical wisdom (*hikmat-e nazari*); therefore, we cannot apply the principles of practical wisdom to reality, for theoretical wisdom deals with facts as they are or were; whereas practical wisdom is confined to man and deals with things as they ought to be - that is, as to how man is to conduct himself - and hence is prescriptive (*insh'Allah*).

But the nature of theoretical wisdom is descriptive (*ikhbar*), that is, it deals with the question as to whether a certain proposition corresponds to facts or not, and if it does, whether it is eternally true. But such questions do not arise in ethics.

In our philosophical literature, theoretical reason and practical reason are regarded as two different types of human faculties. But Muslim philosophers did not discuss their features and differences in sufficient detail. However, they have left useful hints concerning the issue. They suggest that the former faculty is inherent in the soul by means of which it tries to discover the external world; whereas the latter consists of a series of perceptions of the soul, which administers the body, for the body's management.

Practical reason is considered to be a natural arm of the soul and theoretical reason as a metaphysical arm. Thus the soul possesses two perfections: theoretical perfection and practical perfection (the philosophers hold that the essence and nature of human being is knowledge and its perfection lies in knowledge,



whereas the mystics do not consider knowledge as the ultimate perfection of man and are of the view that a perfect man is one who attains to reality not one who discovers it).

Regarding the faculty of practical reason, they hold that the soul as the administrator of the body is subject to certain principles for better governing the body as a prelude to its attaining perfection.

Early Muslim philosophers defined justice in terms of freedom (justice in body). The soul stands in need of the body and it cannot attain theoretical perfection without it, but in order that the soul should be able to make the best use of the body, it must establish a kind of balance between its faculties. The faculty which establishes such a balance between soul and body is an active faculty. In case this balance is established, the soul is not dominated by the body, rather it is the body which is subordinated to the soul. They considered justice to be a kind of subordination of the body to the soul in which the body is controlled by the soul. This is all that our early philosophers have said on this issue. It seems that, relatively speaking, Ibn Sina (980-1030) has treated the issue of theoretical and practical wisdom more thoroughly than any other Muslim philosopher.

In the section on theology of his *al-Shifa'*, Ibn Sina classifies wisdom into practical and theoretical. In the section on logic of the *Shifa'*, he treats it in more detail and probably in his

*Mubahathat* he discusses it in greater detail than in any other place. On the whole these old discussions provide a good ground for study, but they have not treated the subject sufficiently and there even exists some ambiguity about practical reason. That which can be inferred from the statements of some of them is that practical reason is a kind of cognitive faculty of the soul. That is, they maintain that our intellect possess two kinds of cognitive faculties, one is the faculty of cognition used in theoretical sciences and the other is the faculty used in practical sciences. But others like Mulla Hadi Sabzawari (1833-1910) hold that the term 'intellect' (*`aql*) is used equivocally for theoretical and practical reason and that practical reason is not a cognitive faculty, that it is a faculty of action and not one of cognition. Hence their statements do not make clear whether or not practical and theoretical reason are two cognitive faculties (regardless of whether they are two distinct faculties or two aspects of one faculty), or if one of these is a cognitive and the other a practical faculty. In the later case, using the term 'reason' for practical reason is equivocal, that is, practical reason is not reason in the sense of a cognitive faculty.

### **Subjectivity of Normative Judgements**

It should be noted that 'Allamah Tabataba'i's discussion of *i 'tibariyat* (subjective or normative ideas) in the sixth chapter of

his book *Usul-e falsafeh wa ravish-e realism* ('The Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism') is undoubtedly an invaluable and original idea (unfortunately I was not able to write complete footnotes on it). Its only demerit is that he has himself conceived this idea and then followed it up without relating it to the statements of his predecessors which could help us in tracing the roots of these issues in the words of thinkers like Ibn Sina and others on practical reason and theoretical reason. It would have been better if he had started from their statements. The reason for such a gap is that his point of departure was jurisprudence (*'ilm al-usul*) not philosophy. He was inspired by the ideas of the late Shaykh Muhammad Husayn Isfahani regarding *i'tibariyat*. Therefore, he did not relate it to the views of the philosophers.

'Allamah Tabataba'i maintains - and this is of course my interpretation - that whatever we ascribe to practical wisdom relates to the world of *i'tibari* (subjective) notions. Thus, theoretical wisdom or objective truth consists of objective ideas which are the real face of things. Practical ideas are normative notions. Normative ideas comprise of commands and prohibitions and all those notions which are dealt with in *'ilm al-usul*.

The 'Allamah considers all *i'tibariyat* of the type where an objective idea is extended and applied to something else; human reason or the soul as a cognitive faculty cannot originate or create a concept, as in its literal and metaphorical use of words. A

metaphor consists of the application of the literal and non-metaphorical meaning in a metaphorical sense. Whether we agree with Sakkaki's view and hold that the word retains its original meaning and some other thing is imagined as its instance, or disagree with him and believe that the word is used in another meaning, one thing is clear: that the intellect and the soul are unable to spontaneously create concepts like ownership. On the contrary it borrows a concept that already exists in its objective form and applies it in its metaphorical sense.

He started from this point and followed it up opening up a very extensive field. In this approach all moral concepts, including good and evil and the like, are considered to be *i'tibari* concepts. He has discussed in detail whether the notion of 'good' is derived from 'ought' or 'ought' from 'good.' Earlier in Najaf he had written an article in Arabic on the normative sciences (*'ulum-e i'tibari*) and the article in Farsi (i.e. the sixth chapter of his above-mentioned book) is based on its contents.

Regarding the concept of 'ought', he arrived at the conclusion that all 'oughts' stem from the fact that nature in itself has some ends towards which it moves. In all activities in the domains of inanimate objects, plants, animals, and man, so far as they fall within the domain of instinct and are not voluntary, it is nature that moves towards its goal. At the human level there are certain acts which takes place by the means of volition and

thought. In such acts, too, man has certain objectives which have to be attained voluntarily. These ends are also the ends of nature, but it cannot achieve them directly but only through the agency of man's will and thought. It is here that a need for these normative notions arises and they come into existence spontaneously. For example, man's nature, like that of plants, needs food, but he should obtain it by means of volition and thought, unlike plants, which obtain food from the ground directly through their roots, and unlike animals, which are drawn towards food by instinct (whose nature is also not well understood). But man has to do this by conscious volition and effort, without being aware that the system of nature uses his apparatus of thought as its instrument in order to achieve its goals. Man innately possesses two systems: the system of nature as well as the system of thought and will. The latter is subordinate to the former and it is directed to achieving nature's ends. The natural end is reflected in the form of a need or desire in man's soul, for instance, the inclination towards food.

Early Muslim philosophers defined the process of voluntary action as follows: first there is conception of the action, followed by judgement of its usefulness and inclination towards it (there were different views of it), then the stage of resolution, which is followed by emergence of will, after which the voluntary act takes place.

‘Allamah Tabataba’i agrees with this description, but he considers the role of judgement as fundamental. However, here the judgement of the soul is not the kind of theoretical (descriptive) judgment which earlier Muslim philosophers used to call ‘assent of benefit,’ but is a prescriptive judgement (You ought to do this).

He stresses mainly on the point that all voluntary acts contain a kind of command and a prescriptive and normative judgement, for example, "This ought to be done," "This ought not to be done." It is such oughts that cause man to be drawn towards the natural end. The ‘Allamah probably conceives all acts of volition as terminating in knowledge.

These ideas came to the mind of ‘Allamah Tabataba’i and he followed them up independently without studying others' views in this regard. Once I even asked him whether what he says in this regard is in agreement with the ideas of the early Muslim philosophers regarding the difference between practical and theoretical wisdom and their view about the normative character of the notions of good and evil.

In their debates with the theologians (*mutakallimin*) our early philosophers mention certain basic criteria for logical argument and they mention good and evil as criteria that pertain to rhetoric and dialectics, and maintain that the notions of good and evil cannot be employed in logical arguments. They are of

the view that good and evil derive from custom and cite the example of Indians who consider killing of animals as immoral.

If one were to scan philosophical works one would not find a single instance, where the notions of good and evil have been employed to decide a theoretical issue. On the contrary the *mutakallimin* always base their arguments on the notions of moral and immoral. For instance, they hold that the rule of Divine grace is good and that such and such a thing is unseemly for God and that such and such a thing is obligatory for Him, and the like.

The philosophers consider these as normative issues which cannot form the basis of rational argument. Like ‘Allamah Tabataba’i, they also consider good and evil as normative notions.

Another point which gives further importance to his statements is that others like Bertrand Russell, who claim to have originated a new approach in contemporary philosophy, also have a similar viewpoint. Undoubtedly ‘Allamah Tabataba’i was unaware of their views, and I myself, while writing explanatory notes on the ‘Allamah's book *Usul-e falsafeh wa rewish-a realism*, did not notice that his view of the practical sciences and ethics is something new and identical with the latest views about ethics. Perhaps the development of such an idea in the Allamah's mind (about forty years ago in Najaf) was contemporaneous with

the development of this view in European thought. In any case the 'Allamah was definitely unaware of their views.

Among modern European philosophers, Bertrand Russell has elaborated this issue seriously. In his book *A History of Western Philosophy*, Russell states his viewpoint while discussing Plato's philosophy.

Plato has sublime ideas on the topic of ethics. In his view theoretical wisdom and practical wisdom are of the same kind and he looks at them from the same point of view. Regarding the concept of good in ethics he holds that morality means that man should seek what is good, and the good is a cognizable reality independent of the soul. That is, the object of human quest is the same in ethics and objective sciences, as in mathematics or medicine, which are concerned with external objects independent of the human mind.

According to Plato moral values are realities independent of man, so man should try to know them as he tries to know any other reality.

Here it becomes clear that early Muslim philosophers had selective approach in relation to the views of the ancient philosophers. They accepted some of their views and discarded their incorrect views without indicating what they were accepting and what they were discarding. So far as ethics is concerned, they



accepted many of Plato's views but they rejected this idea of Plato, and with justification.

While discussing Plato's views, Bertrand Russell expresses his own viewpoint. He says that we have to analyze the issue of ethics and see where it leads to. How did Plato think when he said that the good exists independent of us. Then he proceeds to analyze in a way very similar to the 'Allama's analysis.

Russell holds that good and evil are relative terms whose meaning is determined by man's relation to objects. When we wish to achieve a goal, we say of a means that helps us attain that goal that 'It is good.' Now, what is meant by saying of a certain thing that 'It is good'? It means that in order to achieve that goal we ought to use this means. The very 'ought to use' is equal to saying 'it is good'. Hence it is wrong to hold that the good is an objective quality inherent in a thing. Plato thinks that goodness is inherent in things, like whiteness or roundness etc., while it is not so. For example, when we say 'Honesty is good,' it is because of a goal which we have chosen. In other words, it is good for us for achieving our goal and therefore we ought to employ it. Yet, it does not mean that it is good for everyone. It is good only for those who have such a goal. Otherwise if one had an opposite goal it would not be good for him.

Bertrand Russell and other philosophers applied their logical analysis to ethics. They come to the conclusion that

‘good’ or ‘evil’ are normative in nature. The mistake of the philosophers down to the present day is that they have thought ethical issues to be like those of mathematics or science. Their approaches to ethics has been similar to their approach to mathematics and physics. For example, as in physics one studies the nature of the magnet to discover its properties, in ethics as well they thought that good and evil are discoverable properties of things.

Q:\* Ethical issues are like scientific issues with the difference that they belong to different realms; otherwise the criterion is the same in both cases.

A: There is no difference between this domain or that. For example, when man speaks, his speaking is a concrete fact no matter whether what he says is true or false. Does this speech have an external and objective property called ‘good’ or ‘evil’? No. Truth or falsehood do not have any objective quality called good or evil. Basically, the meaning of good and evil are determined in term of goals. Truth helps one to achieve one's goal, therefore, one must be truthful. Here the property of goodness is attributed to truthfulness. Lying, owing to its effects, prevent individuals and society from achieving their goal. Therefore, one must not lie and lying is bad. Here one does not

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\* Ustad Shaheed Mutahhari was famous for giving his audience time during his speeches to ask questions [Z.H-M].

have anything except "one ought to say" and "one ought not to say". Good and evil are abstracted from 'ought' and 'ought not.'

Of course, it does not mean that ethics is devoid of reality. Later on we will explain it.

The Europeans thought that they had discovered a very new idea and even today it is a live issue in European philosophy and enjoys wide acceptance. In their view, the ethical theories of Plato, Aristotle, Kant and the like are outdated. They have finally reached this viewpoint. As I said, the early Muslim philosophers also have dealt with this issue and a shortcoming of 'Allamah Tabatabai's work is that he does not relate it to their ideas.

According to Mr. Ha'iri, one of the questions he was asked to answer in a test (in the West) was concerning the relation between theoretical and practical sciences. As the theoretical sciences are related to the practical sciences, they are not isolated from one another. In modern terms, theoretical science constitutes world view whereas practical science constitutes ideology, as in the case of dialectical logic and materialist philosophy which constitute the Marxist world view and their ideology is also based on their world view.

Now the question is how can we derive a prescriptive and normative judgement from factual premises? If the premises are descriptive, no problems arises if the conclusion is also a descriptive statement. For example, we may say A is equal to B,

and B is equal to C; therefore, A is equal to C. However, in the other case the reasoning will have this form: A is equal to B, and B is equal to C; therefore, it ought to be that... How can we drive a normative judgement from a descriptive proposition? Is there any syllogism whose premises are factual and its conclusion is normative and prescriptive? I am not saying that there isn't. But if it exists, how should it be analyzed?

The point is that this topic is a live issue in the West. Russell and his like-minded philosophers are of the view that eternity of moral values is meaningless.

Until here my purpose was to clarify this point that good and evil are not objective and concrete properties of things that can be discovered, as is the case in theoretical sciences. That is, it will be wrong to investigate ethical principles by such a method, for it confuses between normative and factual propositions. However, it may be asked whether there are two types of norms, one mutable and the other immutable. This is another point of contention which we have with them (European thinkers). Incidentally 'Allamah Tabataba'i is also of the view that norms are of two types, immutable and mutable. He has not discussed immutable norms - and the entire issue in general - in any great detail, but he bases his theory on two types of norms. For immutable norms he has given the examples of justice and injustice, stating that the goodness of justice and the evil of injustice are immutable, and there are many mutable norms as well.

## **Permanence of Ethical Norms**

From this point onwards we shall take up the discussion about the issue of 'ought.' No doubt some 'oughts' are particular and related to individuals. For instance, one person may need a certain kind of training, and he might say, "I should take this subject," while another who does not need it would say, "I should not take that subject." Basically, when two persons fight each other, each of them fights for the sake of a certain ought. There is no doubt that individual and particular 'oughts' are relative. For example, when I say that this food is good for me, this statement has a theoretical and a practical aspect. My conclusion concerning the benefit of the food constitutes its theoretical aspect and 'I ought to eat that food' constitutes the practical aspect. In short, these kinds of oughts are particular and changeable.

An important question in ethics is, are there any universal and absolute 'oughts' shared by all human beings? In case there are such oughts, how can such universal oughts be explained on the basis that every 'ought' is directed towards some goal? Incidentally, we reach some fine conclusions at this point.

Concerning the difference between theoretical wisdom and practical wisdom it is not sufficient to say that the former deals with 'is' and the latter with 'ought.' This is not a sufficient

explanation for practical wisdom. After all practical wisdom is wisdom and wisdom deals with universal issues. Hence practical wisdom should be defined as dealing with universal 'oughts,' otherwise there are also certain 'oughts' in geometry, industry etc., but they have nothing to do with practical wisdom. What is to be noted here is that there are universal 'oughts' which are familiar to every mind. Therefore, such 'oughts' must be directed towards goals which are not particular and individual. If we could prove such 'oughts,' we will have to accept that they are rooted in the soul and that man is not confined to physical nature only. This will be one of the proofs of the immaterial nature of soul.

Kant also reached the immortality of the soul through moral issues. Man's physical nature has some needs which are limited and relative. The needs of one person differ from those of another person. The 'oughts' for meeting such needs are also different and often contradict one another. There are many 'oughts' which are opposed to other 'oughts' and so such 'oughts' are not of an ethical nature. But man, by virtue of his soul, enjoys a station which - like man's physical nature, to which his outward will and thought are subject - draws him towards its own goals. Man's physical nature draws him towards its goals in order to attain its own perfection. It needs food, and we say we ought to eat food. According to Schopenhauer, we are made to feel pleasure and to be on look out for pleasure in the world of ideas, while we are

unaware of the fact that within our inner being it is nature which seeks to achieve its ends. It is nature that moves towards its end, but it provides pleasure for us in order to make us serve its own purposes. While in the world of ideas we are drawn towards pleasure, in reality we move to fulfill the goals of nature. For example, when the baby cries, it is nature which seeks to bring him up. When the baby cries due to the feeling of pain, it is nature which declares its need, having subjected the baby's feeling and mind.

Man enjoys a certain spiritual perfection and sublimity which is rooted in his God-given nobility and dignity (some 'oughts' are meant to achieve that spiritual perfection). When someone says, 'I ought to do such and such a thing,' it means 'I must attain to that excellence,' although such a goal may not be reflected in his outer consciousness. Those excellence are common to all men, and, therefore, in this respect all men feel the same kind of imperative.

The second justification for universal imperatives is the issue of social spirit. It is said that man is a social creature and he has certain oughts, to meet not his individual but his social needs. In the same way that man is impelled to seek the satisfaction of his individual needs he is impelled to seek the satisfaction of his social needs. Had there been no relations between man and his fellow men, such oughts would not have arisen. For instance, if I

had no relations with anyone I would not make any efforts to feed other people. Such imperatives are related to a higher self, be it an individual higher self or a higher social self. That higher self seeks to achieve its goals. That self causes man to perform moral acts. Those acts which are performed for the sake of the higher individual self or the social self have permanent principles, which are, firstly, universal and same for all individuals and, secondly, are permanent and not temporary.

The other point which has been raised concerns the philosophy of being and the philosophy of becoming. According to the philosophy of being moral values are permanent and therefore ethical principles are eternally true. However, according to the philosophy of becoming moral values are relative and transitory; that is, they are valid during a certain time and invalid in other times.

This is a very important issue, for apart from ethics it touches other judgements as well. According to the philosophy of becoming no truth is permanent. Reality is transient and therefore prescriptions are also transitory, for the difference between truth and morality is that the former is descriptive and the latter is prescriptive, one is theoretical and the other is practical. Inevitably this question also arises in the case of all religious precepts and is not confined to what we mean by the term 'ethics' (*akhlaq*). What they (i.e. Westerners) imply by 'ethics' is a more



general sense which includes all prescriptions and the notions of good and evil.

At the outset an objection may be raised here, that the philosophy of becoming does not necessarily imply that truth is changeable. For as we have said the philosophy of becoming relates to external reality, and even if one were to admit that there is nothing except becoming, it does not imply that truth (which is related to the mind) is subject to change. Of course, we accept the implication that should facts, which include human thought, be subject to change, consequently truth as human thought will also be subject to change. But they do not make such an assertion. We believe that truth, which is the content of thought, is inseparable from external and mental existence except in conception.

For example, the statement "Zayd was standing on Friday" is always true. This statement itself, apart from external or mental existence, is not something that may be said to be neither in the mind nor in external reality, a proposition that is eternally true. This proposition has either external existence or mental existence. But when man thinks about it, he first abstracts it from mental existence, and after abstracting its meaning declares it to be eternally true. We believe that if thought itself were changeable, its content will also be changeable, and the statement "Zayd was standing on Friday" will not be conceived today in the mind as it was conceived yesterday. It will change into something else.

This was in relation to the permanence of truth. The same objection can be raised in relation to moral values. Suppose we believe in a philosophy of becoming, and it implies that truth is changeable. But morals and precepts are a set of prescriptions and these are normative in nature. The changeability of truth does not necessitate the changeability of norms. In an article, "*Khatm-e Nubuwwat*," ("The Ultimacy of the Prophethood"), I have pointed out that if anybody claims that all things are subject to change, then the ultimate prophecy and everlasting laws become meaningless. Our position is that if truth be mutable it does not imply that prescriptions should also be mutable. For prescriptions derive from convention and the law of change of facts does not apply to prescriptions. Thus, it is wrong to assert that a philosophy of becoming will imply mutability of moral values. However, there is another argument that may be offered to support this view.

This other argument is that every prescription, ethical or non-ethical, is based on certain expediencies. This view coincides with the view of the theologians, and jurisprudence following them, who maintain that "religious obligations are subtle instances of rational obligations," or, in the words of Na'ini, certain benefits and harms underlie the causes of religious precepts, which are meant to achieve those benefits and are

therefore subordinate to objective benefits and harms, like an effect subordinate to its cause.

The benefits are facts and commands and prohibitions are based on conventions and norms. But the benefits and harms from which the commands and prohibitions stem are not permanent, for they are facts. Thus when the former are not permanent the latter also will not be permanent. The objection to the eternity of moral values takes another form in accordance with this argument.

Now we wish to make a fundamental examination of ethical criteria and confine our discussion to ethics in our own special sense. The question of religious precepts requires a wide-ranging study and has many ramifications pertaining to worship, social and financial issues and other matters.

In the sphere of ethics, one may maintain that moral values are permanent on the basis that moral values are identical with reality, in the sense that a moral act is good because it is essentially attributed with the quality of goodness. The immoral act is bad because it is attributed with the quality of badness. Hence every act is either essentially moral or essentially immoral, although it may be said that there are some acts which are neither essentially moral nor immoral. It means that moral goodness and evil are objective qualities of things inherent in their essences, and that which is essential is not mutable. That which is morally

good is good forever and that which is immoral will always remain immoral. We should do that which is morally good and refrain from that which is immoral, and this is a self-evident and indisputable judgement of reason. This is one of the arguments that may be offered in favour of the permanence of ethical values. Such an argument is based on the essential character of good and evil which are considered as objective attributes.

Muslim philosophers have not discussed this issue but they do not believe in good and evil as being inherent in things. In logic, they consider any reference to morality or immorality as reference to popular convention which finds use only in dialectics and rhetoric. They even point out that morals vary with nations and they cite the example of Indians who consider slaughter of animals as immoral. However they do not elaborate and do not explain why the notions of moral goodness and evil cannot be employed in rational arguments. They do not explain why they are different from mathematical propositions and what criterion underlies this distinction. They only say that morality or immorality pertain to the rules of practical reason. However it is clear that practical reason develops such notions in order to achieve certain goals. In any case they have not elaborated upon this matter.

## The Origins of Normative Notions

Among philosophers 'Allamah Tabataba'i has treated this issue more thoroughly than anyone else. In the sixth chapter of his book *Usul-e falsafeh wa ravishe realism*, he has discussed profoundly this issue, which is related partly to philosophy in that it explains the process of development of ideas by the mind. However, the greater part of this discussion relates to jurisprudence (*'ilm al-usul*). There he has discussed the origin and character of the development of normative ideas, and this topic deserves to be studied in greater depth and thoroughness. However, here I will give a brief summary of his ideas relating to this discussion.

He begins by asserting that one of the functions of the mind is that it abstracts certain ideas from external objects (an operation that does not involve any innovation) then applies them to another reality, that is, it applies the definition of one thing to another thing. In technical and literary terms, it invents metaphors. A metaphor, especially in accordance with Sakkaki's view, is not simply the use of a word in some other meaning. It does not simply involve applying, for instance the word 'lion,' after divesting of its meaning, to a person with a similar quality. No. A metaphor involves a change in meaning not a change in word. Actually what we do is that we see, for instance, Zayd as

an instance of the meaning of 'lion,' then we apply the word 'lion' to him. This is a kind of innovation of the mind. The late Ayatullah Burujerdi would make an interesting remark in this relation. He would say that when we say, "I saw a lion shooting", this statement is actually composed of the two following statements: "I saw Zayd shooting," and "Zayd is like a lion." He agreed with Sakkaki's conception of the metaphor.

Such is 'Allamah Tabatabai's notion of the mind's capacity to formulate and invent concepts by supposing - not arbitrarily but in accordance with a certain basis - one thing as an instance of another thing.

Another observation that he makes (though I do not agree with its generalization) is that the difference between animals on one hand and plants and inanimate things on the other is that the latter move towards their end in one predetermined direction alone. Nature, in the course of its normal movement, is equipped with means through which it moves inexorably towards its goal. Animals also, in respect of their physical and natural being (not as beings possessing cognition and mind), like plants move directly towards their end in the natural world. But in their case, in most of their activities, the means of nature do not suffice to direct animals towards their goals. That is why they employ their mental and cognitive faculties to achieve their ends and in fact there emerges a kind of harmony between physical nature (which

is unconscious) and the mind which functions in a manner enabling nature to achieve its ends. The mind is however directed to achieving a series of ends which are supposed to be different from the ends of nature and one imagines that the harmony between the two is accidental.

The cognitive nature of man and animal is such that when they perceive and conceive an object there arises a desire and appetite for it as [an expectation of] pleasure in attaining it and of pain in the failure to attain it. This is followed by the motive to obtain the pleasure or to avoid the pain. For instance, man feels hunger and with his past experience of the pleasure in eating food he seeks food in order to obtain that pleasure. But at the same time in the process of this act nature too attains its end, for the body needs food in order to replace the materials it has consumed. Eating serves both the ends, the conscious purpose of pleasure is attained and at the same time nature also satisfies its need. Hence, the question arises: Are these two acts unconnected with each other and is their coincidence something accidental? Is it possible for the case to be otherwise, that is, a person might feel pleasure in eating stones while his stomach requires some other food? Is it an accident that delicious foods which bring pleasure to one who eats also helps satisfy the nature's needs? Or is it the case that there is no accident involved here and there exists a kind of harmony between the two, where one is primary and the other

is secondary? In case there is no accident involved here, is the conscious desire to obtain pleasure and to avoid pain the primary principle which requires an apparatus that may cooperate with it for the end of pleasure by digesting food and absorbing nourishing substances? Or is the case quite the inverse and it is nature which constitutes the primary principle, having subjugated the conscious mind to its service. Undoubtedly, there is some kind of harmony between the natural and conscious ends. Hence every animal takes pleasure in what nature needs and nature also needs that which brings pleasure. For instance, a woman is equipped with organs and glands required for child bearing and nursing and she finds pleasure in these acts. The animal that lays eggs takes pleasure in that act, and an animal that gives birth takes pleasure in that act as well. There exists a strong harmony between them.

It is wrong to think that purposive movement is confined to conscious beings only. When it is said that nature has certain ends, some people may raise doubts as to whether unconscious nature may have ends. In fact ends are related to that very unconscious nature and the conscious mind has ends which are incidental to the ends of nature. The end of nature is to move towards its perfection. As remarked by Ibn Sina, the possession of consciousness does not make purposive a being that lacks



purpose. Purposiveness is related to the essence of a thing. Sometimes a thing is aware of its end and sometimes it is not.

Q: There is not always a harmony between pleasure and natural need. Many pleasures are harmful for nature and injurious to its perfection.

A: Deviant cases are not to be taken into consideration, particularly in the case of human being who act according to reason. What I mean is that there is a general harmony that exists to such an extent that it cannot be accidental. Exceptional cases, like that of the sick person who needs medicine without feeling any pleasure in taking it, arise out of a kind of difference between two exigencies, a topic which has its own details. An animal takes pleasure in eating its medicine because it acts according to instinct, while the human being, who acts according to his reason, does not take pleasure in it.

‘Allamah Tabataba’i says that the world of normative concepts begins here. The way he explains the issue it appears as if all animate beings including man and animals possess such ideas. But I do not agree with this generalization. According to him there is a necessary relation between nature and ends, like the concrete, objective and philosophical relation between cause and effect. Now in the world of conception man takes the objective relation of necessity - as opposed to the relation of contingency - between two things in nature and applies that

relation to two things between which there is no such real relation. For example, he applies the term 'lion' to a brave man. Here, too, man applies the term 'necessity' as found in external nature to the relation between himself and his goal. Such necessities and oughts created by the mind, arise out of such conceptions. The 'Allamah is of the view that such oughts exist in every voluntary act and in every conscious animal.

The earlier Muslim philosophers did not believe in such an ought or imperative. They only held that man first conceives the benefit in something, then there arises a desire for it, followed by a resolution. They described its various stages stating that first there is conception followed by a judgement of the benefit. This judgment in their view posits something objective, that is, a certain object has a certain benefit. The final stage is the stage of volition. However, they did not believe that a normative judgement was involved here.

But 'Allamah Tabataba'i holds that such a conception and imperative is involved here and the statement that something is good has no other meaning. When we say that it is good to do something, its 'goodness' arises from here. There is another issue involved here as to whether 'good' arises out of 'ought' or the case is the reverse. As the 'Allamah holds that 'ought' is the first formulation (*i'tibar*), he holds that 'good' arises from it. "It is good to do so" signifies a kind of inclination towards something

and it is as if one were attributing objective and concrete qualities to human actions.

### **The Theory of Employment**

Then he has some other views to which he repeatedly refers in his exegesis of the Holy Qur'an, *Al-Mizan*, and in other places. He holds that one of the normative formulations is that of 'employment' (*istikhdam*). To explain, man has a certain relation to his limbs and faculties and this relation is objective, real and concrete. My hands are at my service. All bodily organs of man are owned by man and form an integral part of his being and are really at the service of man. He says that every external object may take the form of a tool in the service of man, and in the same way that his hands belong to him he considers other objects as his own. This kind of extension is typical of subjective formulations. (*i'tibar*). Man extends the boundaries of that which is limited to his existence to other beings. He considers such a human tendency to extend concepts as something instinctive. Then he adds that this kind of conceptual attitude is not limited to inanimate objects, plants, etc.; rather man views even other human beings from the viewpoint of 'employment.' Man is created an exploiter and this is a natural tendency in him. He accepts social and moral issues as secondary principles. However, in this chapter he does not discuss this issue in detail

but he does so in his exegesis, *Al-Mizan*, under verse 2:213, "*Mankind were a single nation*". Perhaps there is apparently a contradiction in his statements in different places. At one place he says that 'employment' is a natural principle and that social justice is at the same time natural to man but is modified by the other natural principle. Sometimes in his exegesis he is explicit that man is not social by nature but social by adaptation. In the sixth chapter of his *Usul-e falsafeh wa ravish-e realism*, he states that man is social by nature, but what he means is by adaptation, as mentioned by him elsewhere. So he does not hold that man is social by nature. His socialization is outcome of the result of equilibrium between two opposite instincts. His statements appear in this regard to be similar to the views of contemporary evolutionists and Darwinians who believe the struggle for survival to be fundamental in man.

The principle of employment is a respectable form of the Darwinian idea, for according to it struggle for survival constitutes the basis of the human being and cooperation arises out of struggle. Man struggles for survival, but the enemy is not always of one kind; when several men face a common enemy and feel that they cannot defeat him individually, cooperation is the only way to survival. Here cooperation is like political treaties between states, meant only to deter the common enemy. In fact such cooperation arises out of struggle. Hence when there is no

more a common enemy, conflict begins among apparent friends. Again after some time differences arise within the dominating group and grow into a war among them. If finally there remain only two individuals they fight against each other until the fittest survives.

If we trace the roots of moral rules on cooperation, friendship, and unity, they will be seen to stem from conflict. The implication is that if you want to survive in your confrontation with the enemy (whether it is nature or something else) you should be honest, truthful and so on. This is the viewpoint of the evolutionists, and the 'Allamah's ideas lead to such a conclusion, though he does not say so explicitly.

Q: Does man have a natural inclination towards evil?

A: That is what it means. However, evil is relative, and from the viewpoint of the individual it is good. Every individual has a natural tendency to seek his own good, which makes him treat others as tools (such is the 'Allamah's view). Man cannot refrain from treating others as tools.

Q: Struggle for survival is not the same as 'employment.' Sometime they may coincide and sometimes not.

A: I did not say that the two concepts are identical. What I mean is that both of them lead to the same conclusion. When we say that every individual tries to treat others as his tools and to

use them, when such a tendency is universal it will automatically lead to conflict.

The 'Allamah continues his discussion on normative formulations and most of it has greater relevance to jurisprudence than to ethical philosophy and its relevant part was that which we have described.

He further holds that man formulates the oughts and ought nots to attain certain ends. Since these ends are transient, precepts and laws will also be subject to change and as long as those ends remains the ought will remain as well, and when the end changes, the ought will also change. Thus the 'Allamah holds that normative conceptions, unlike objective conceptions, are transitory and impermanent and almost concludes that moral values cannot be eternal. Nevertheless, it is to be pointed out that he maintains that there are certain normative principles which are immutable, which are five or six and these are permanent and the rest of them are subject to change. The principles which he regards as permanent are not of much relevance here, like the principle of necessity in general, the principle of employment and other similar things whose discussion will be fruitless here.

### **Will and Natural Urge**

An explanation that is necessary here is that his application of the principle of employment to all animate beings is not

acceptable. In my footnotes to the chapter I have discussed the issue in a manner which does not assume such a generalization. It is not even true of man in all his voluntarily acts but only of some of his voluntarily actions which are performed thoughtfully. It is here that the issues of moral imperative and the rational character of what is moral and immoral arise. The acts of immature persons, like infants taking milk, are rather derived from instinct. Elsewhere I have drawn a distinction between urge and will. The animal, contrary to what is said loosely that an animal is that which moves voluntarily, acts according to inclination and urge. In a mature human being there is a relation between will and reason on the one hand and between inclination or appetite and reason on the other. Urge is a passive state. In an animal or man that acts under urge, the greater the influence of urge the lesser is the role of thought, consciousness and reason and the action takes an involuntary form. For example, when man sees food, he feels inclined towards it and it is as if there were something external that draws him towards itself. On the contrary, when man acts according to his will, he withdraws from what is external to his being and his decision arises from his inner being. For example, if he has feels an inclination for a certain kind of food, he thinks over its consequences and then decides to take some other food for which he feels a lesser inclination. He controls himself by his will and it is his will which enables him to dissociate himself

from that which is external to his being. Hence will is identical with freedom. Reason and will liberate man from the tyranny of urges and make him rely upon himself. Of course, sometimes both inclination and will may be present. That is, one may be inclined towards something which may be the object of one's will due to the judgement of reason.

Q: Is will totally absent in cases where there is an inclination, or is it only weak?

A: Will is there, but it is weak. What I want to point out is that will and inclination are two separate things. To the extent that man is subject to inclination, his will is proportionately weak. I do not agree with Mulla Sadra (though elsewhere he has expressed an opposite opinion), Mulla Hadi Sabzawari and Ibn Sina in considering inclination and will as one thing. Elsewhere they, including even Ibn Sina, have drawn a distinction between the two. Will is the state of self-possession of the soul, a state of resolution, where reason is involved and rational calculations are made and the judgement of reason prevails.

Moral imperatives relate to man as a rational being (in the same way as early Muslim Philosophers consider them as part of practical reason), not to the soul from a practical aspect. Moral approval and disapproval are judgements of practical reason (the contemplative faculty which comprehends universals) from the aspect of the government of the body. Otherwise moral norms are



irrelevant to animals or to man from the viewpoint of not being subject to the judgements of reason.

Metaphorical ideas are exclusive to man. His thought has reached the point where he can apply the term for something to another thing. For instance, he sees the moon and then sees a human being possessing beauty to whom he is drawn. He applies the term for the former and transfers to the latter his feelings evoked by the moon. This act signifies man's developed nature and no animal is capable of such an act. This act is a kind of make up and adornment; i.e. man observes a kind of beauty in someone and then he adds to it by supplementing accidental graces, while he knows that these graces do not belong to that person but are charms borrowed from extraneous colour, water, and line but which heighten his feelings of attraction towards that person. This is what happens in metaphorical and poetical expressions. When the poet refers to something with metaphors, that thing assumes a greater charm in his sight, as in the case of Rudaki who wrote those verses for the Samanid prince using those metaphors for Bukhara. Bukhara remained what it was but he projected the city in such charming terms that they moved the prince. These are miracles of the human mind.

Q: Is this the Pavlovian conditioned reflex?

A: No. Pavlovian conditioned reflex relates to the materialist approach to perception (not to normative concepts)

which tries to give a materialist interpretation to human thought. Pavlov talks of involuntary human reflexes. The issue of conditioned reflex or association of ideas is different from the issue of values and metaphor. In the latter there is no succession and association. Here one sees something as something else. That is, he joins it to the other and applies the definition of one thing to another thing. There is no succession of ideas as in association. In metaphor there is a simultaneous unification of two things, not a succession of several things. This is what gives the power of passion and pathos to elegies.

Thus one of the objections against the 'Allamah's view is that he generalizes the faculty of normative formulation to all animate beings, whereas it is exclusive to man and that too to his practical reason.

Early Muslim philosophers defined practical wisdom, which includes ethics, as the science of man's voluntary actions in respect of how they ought to be and how they can be best and most perfect. This definition given by early Muslim philosophers is somewhat similar to that of theoretical wisdom which deals with the most perfect order and the question whether or not the existing order is the best and most perfect order possible. This question however relates to whether something exists or not, and in the discussion of man's voluntary acts the question relates to how something ought to be and how it can be most perfect.

According to modern philosophers ethics deals with the question, how should one live one's life, i.e. it does not deal with how men live but with how they should live. This almost amounts to the same thing with certain added qualifications. One relates to universality. When the early Muslim philosophers defined ethics as a science of man's voluntary acts they meant a universal prescription for all human beings, not for any particular person. The other point that should be mentioned here is that when modern philosophers hold that ethics deals with how one should live one's life, a qualification is to added here – and they often add it themselves, thus coming closer to the viewpoint of ancient philosophers - stating that what is meant is a life imbued with sublimity and sanctity. The meaning of ethics is loaded with a sense of sublimity and sanctity, or value in contemporary terms.

Another point whose mention here is not without benefit is that when it said that ethics is the science of how one must live one's life, that includes behaviour and habit, that is, what kind of conduct and habits one must have to lead a worthy life.

Also nowadays another point that is mentioned, which is also found in our philosophy, is that ethics deals only with how man should live and it is assumed that man's nature is already known, and it is with the knowledge of this nature that the question of how he must live so that his life possesses sublimity and sanctity arises. As we know, the existentialists have certain

views about the fundamentally of existence (Mulla Sadra's philosophy is also based on the fundamentally of existence) and they hold man to be a potential and indeterminate being. That is, his essence is not predetermined and it is man's acts which form his habits and these habits constitute man's identity and essence. Man does not have an essence apart from his habits and they constitute the substantial actuality of man's existence. It is his habits and traits which make and determine man's being. More precisely, ethics is not only the science of how one should live but the science of what one should become. When we talk of ethics as the science of how one should live, it is assumed that we know what we are and then go on to discuss how man with his fixed nature and essence, which is the same in all men, is to live.

But if we hold that habits constitute the essence of man then ethics will take a new dimension. If man can shape his reality with his morals and habits, then his inner being and essence will change and accordingly ethics assumes a more profound meaning.

Men have the same form, but from the spiritual viewpoint their reality depends on their morals and habits. Hence the definition of 'man' may apply to some persons in respect of form while in respect of their inner being the term 'animal' may be true of them.

With this definition of practical wisdom let us follow up the foregoing discussion. We said that the issue of moral imperatives signifies man's relation to a certain act and stems from his feeling. That is man's nature seeks certain goals and in consonance with those ends certain feelings emerge in his conscious faculty. He desires what his nature seeks, and this finally leads him to declare, 'I like that thing' and 'It is good.'

Bertrand Russell and others hold - and 'Allamah Tabatabai's views lead to the same conclusion - that there can be no objective criterion for ethics. For instance, when I say that something is good, it means I like it, and my liking it does not mean that somebody else should also like it. Others may like something else. Those who lived in the past regarded what they liked as good, while today people regard something else as good.

Here a question arises: How can ethical issues be demonstrated? How can we argue as to what is good and what is bad? The 'Allamah is of the view that these are not demonstrable, for normative matters cannot be proven. We can only test them on the basis of utility (futility). That is, the mind's normative formulations are meant to achieve certain goals and if they do not help one reach them they are invalid.

Moral issues cannot be tested except through the test of utility. They are not objective matters that can be proven by experiment or reasoning. They can be proven neither by

deduction nor by the empirical method. In deduction the premises are based on self evident-principles, or on empirical experience, whereas practical wisdom is concerned with the concept of good and bad and these concepts are derive from ought and ought not, which in their turn depend upon likes and dislikes, which are not identical in all people and vary according to their personal situation, interests, pursuits and their attachments to various creeds, groups, and nations. Therefore, every individual and groups likes certain things and therefore moral values are inevitably subjective and relative. Hence moral concepts are not objective issues susceptible to logical proof or deductive or inductive methods.

### Three Ethical Theories

Bertrand Russell is one of the thinkers who arrived at the same conclusion through his philosophy of logical analysis. In his book, *A History of Western Philosophy*, while examining Plato's conception of justice and Trasymachus's famous objection against it, that justice is nothing but the interests of the powerful, Russell is of the view that this is the basic problem of politics and ethics: is there any criterion in ethics to distinguish between good and bad except that which is meant by those who use these terms? If there is no such criterion then most of Trasymachus's

conclusions will inescapable. But how can one say that such a criterion exists?

Elsewhere Russell says that the difference between Plato and Trasymachus is very important. Plato thinks that he can prove that his idea of republic is good. A democrat who accepts the objectivity of ethics may think that he can prove the Republic to be immoral; but anyone who agrees with Trasymachus will say: There is no question of proving or disproving; the only question is whether you like or not. If you do, it is good for you; if you do not it is bad for you. It is like matters of taste; one may like a certain kind of food and say that this food is good and others may like another kind and say that, that food is good. There is no absolute good to compare other goods with. He further says that if you like it, it is good for you; if you do not, it is bad for you. If some like it and some don't the matter cannot be decided by reason, but only by force. That which is said that justice belongs to the powerful, that is because when some people like something and others don't, those who have greater power impose their wishes on others by force and that becomes law.

The gist of Russell's statements is that the concepts of good and bad indicate the relation between man and the thing in question. If this relation is one of liking it is good and if it is one of dislike then it is bad. If it is neither liked nor disliked, then it neither good nor evil.

We have written that the answer to Russell is that first we have to trace the roots of why man likes something and dislikes something else. Man likes anything that serves the purpose of life even if from a particular aspect. In other words, nature always moves towards its perfection and in order to impel man to carry out that which must be accomplished through his will and choice it has placed desire, liking and love in him in the same way that it has informed him with the notions of good and evil.

As nature moves towards individual perfection and expediency, it also moves towards the perfection of the species as well. Basically the individual's perfection is not separable from the perfection of his species. The individual's perfection lies in that of the species, and inevitably a kind of likes equally shared by all individuals take shape equally in all individuals. These similar, uniform, universal and absolute likes constitute the universal criterion of morality. Justice and other moral values are the ends towards which nature moves for the perfection of the kind. In order to attain such ends through voluntary action it creates a liking for these ends in all individuals. By virtue of that liking the oughts and ought nots appear in the form of a series of universal imperatives in the soul. Accordingly, to have a universal criterion in ethics it is not necessary to consider good and evil objective entities like whiteness and blackness, roundness and squareness. Russell considers the ego in "I like it,"



as an ego solely concerned with its material and physical or as an ego that is concerned with the interests of its kind.

Here we will mention two or three hypotheses and then try to substantiate the above remarks. We have to see whether or not there actually exists a set of common, universal and permanent imperatives in man's soul (this minor premise has to be derived through experience). That is, do there exist in the human conscience any notions commonly held by all individuals in addition to the temporary, particular, and individual notions of good and bad? I mean those universal imperatives that are devoid of personal preferences and tastes in which all that is relevant is personal interest. Do such imperatives exist according to which man makes judgements occasionally even despite his personal preferences?

One may say I don't know the analysis of such an issue, but I know this much that I and all people have certain universal precepts according to which we judge, for instance, that honesty is good in itself, whatever the basis of this judgement, or that it is good to return kindness for kindness. This judgement transcends all personal interests, and one cannot deny if someone says that a kindness returned for kindness a thousand years ago is praiseworthy or that anyone who ever returned evil for kindness is blameworthy. Undeniably there are two kinds of acts involved here; one act is praiseworthy and valuable for man and the other

is worthless or has a negative value. If one were to compare with a free mind two kinds of characters, such as Abu Dharr and Mu'awiyah, in order to make a judgement concerning them, he will see that Abu Dharr was a man to whom Mu'awiyah was ready to give everything to buy his loyalty and to make him relinquish his higher principles. He did not surrender to the devices of Mu'awiyah who had made everything a means of attaining his ambitions.

Here one naturally commends the former and condemns the latter. The same test may be applied in case of other characters and the result will invariably be the same. We are not concerned with the opinion that all judgements concerning goodness and badness derive from likes or dislikes. That may be true, but firstly we want to see whether or not there exist common and universal judgements. Secondly, if they do, how can we justify them? Are they justifiable according to what the 'Allamah and Russell have said?

We said that there are two kinds of ought and ought not; one kind is particular and individual which we regularly come across in everyday life. For instance, I ought to eat such food, I ought to wear such a dress, and so on. The second kind of imperatives, of which examples were cited, is universal in nature.

Now the question is what is the basis of such universal judgements? If we do not agree with the theologians in

considering goodness and badness as objective attributes and hold that these notions ultimately pertain to man's relation to a thing, then how can we justify universal moral judgements?

### **First Theory**

There are three kinds of justification. According to the first, man has certain urges which serve to fulfill his individual needs. For instance when hungry, he feels an urge for food. Man has also another kind of urges which are species oriented. That is, man may desire something which is not for his individual benefit but for the sake of others. For instance, man does not like others to, go hungry in the same way that he does not want to remain hungry himself. God has created man such.

If we accept this justification, then the 'Allamah's view becomes implausible for he holds that man's motives are consonant with his natural urges. That is, man's motives are subject to his individual nature. He holds the principle of employment to be a universal principle and this conflicts with the foregoing justification. For according to it a self-seeking act is ordinary and mediocre, but when the same act is formed for the sake of others it is considered to be sublime and sacred. Here serving others is a criterion of sanctity and self-seeking a criterion of its absence. If an act is meant for one's own benefit it is for individual benefit and if it is for others it is for mankind in

general, and such an act is moral in nature. Thus the criterion of the moral or immoral character of an act depends in one sense on its being for one's own self or for the sake of others, that is, in its purpose being individual or universal. It is universality that gives value to an act although in other respects it is no different from an act done for personal and individual motives.

Accordingly, it is true that 'It is good' means 'I like it', but sometimes I may like something for myself and sometimes for the sake of others. Inevitably, what I like for others and for their benefit takes a universal aspect (for it is not for the sake of any particular person among others) and is permanent value. Accordingly, moral acts are also universal and permanent. A moral act is one that stems from liking others' good and benefit. This makes ethics universal and permanent. This approach to ethics also justifies certain cases like lying for the sake of some beneficial purpose. Why is truthfulness good? Because the general good lies in truthfulness. If truthfulness should prove to be injurious then it is immoral, for truthfulness is not good in itself. The criterion of goodness is service to others. In cases where truthfulness amounts to betraying others, it becomes bad. Here ethics assumes solely a social dimension (nowadays 'ethics' is usually considered to mean social ethics). Accordingly, we arrive at a conclusion that there is a universal principle in ethics which is eternal and permanent, although it may have changing

instances. There is a difference between the impermanence of an ethical principle and the impermanence of its instances. The question is whether moral principles are permanent or not. Accordingly to our justification moral acts are reducible to one immutable principle, that is, service to others.

Q: In fact this principle is a kind of hypothesis, that is, it is assumed that ethics is service to others, then it is declared that it is universal and permanent principle. However, someone may make some other assumption and hold that ethics means self-help in which case he would produce another immutable and universal principle.

A: You have missed the first premises. As I said there are certain issues on which all men make the same judgement. That is, all viewpoints are identical about a certain act. Besides, all consider it a valuable act. Service to others is something about which I and you have the same feeling. Moreover, I view it as something sublime and above personal interests in the same way that you view it. Then we posed the question as to how such a universal principle could exist when values like goodness and badness stem from likes and dislikes, which are changeable. Yes, if all likes were rooted in selfish motives, as Russell believes and as can be inferred from the 'Allamah's words, then such an objection could be valid, but not if it is held that man is created with two kinds of motives.

Q: The word 'others' in the foregoing discussion is somewhat ambiguous. It seems that it cannot be taken in an absolute sense. For example, a soldier who fights for the interest of foreigners, fights for others but his act is not ethical.

A: By 'others' I mean mankind. That is, an act that is for the sake of mankind, not for the benefit of one individual and to the detriment another. We have an individual ego as well as a collective ego, which includes a person's family and relations (every tyrant is a benefactor for his family). Here the concept of the self is extended. Moral acts go beyond the limit of the ego and sometimes transcend even the domain of humanity (being for the sake of God). Morality begins where the confines of the ego are transcended.

However, this theory cannot be accepted due to the objections that arise against it on the basis of the Allamah's theory, which cannot be set aside so simply by conceding that there is a disharmony between man's conscious being and his individual nature. For that would mean that individual nature moves in one direction and his conscious being in another, solely pursuing the perfection of species without attending to individual perfection. The result would be that man's conscious being, which is at the service of his nature - and so it must be - will be brought into the service of the species without any concern for the individual's interests.

Q: On the basis of what you have said, service to the species is also part of man's nature?

A: No. Service to species is not part of individual nature, but man takes pleasure in helping others and that is not without reason. For individual nature cannot derive pleasure without moving towards perfection. According to Ibn Sina if man feels pleasure, it does not mean that nature and feeling move on different independent courses. Rather it is nature that achieves its perfection, and when that happens pleasure is felt if it is perceived through knowledge by presence. That is, the very movement of nature from potentiality to perfection is identical with pleasure when perceived through knowledge by presence. Pleasure is nature's attainment to perfection when it is perceivable. It is impossible for man to take pleasure without nature attaining a perfection.

## **Second Theory**

There is another theory advocated by some contemporary thinkers. According to it, it is impossible for man to desire anything that is unrelated to his own self. Whatever the individual enjoys doing is ultimately related to his own self. However, man has two selves: an individual self and a collective self. Biologically man is an individual, but from the social point of view he has also a social self. The other point that Durkheim and others have made - and 'Allamah Tabataba'i has derived it from

the Qur'an without being aware of their ideas - is that society has also a self and personality which is real and objective. Society is not a sum total of individuals in the sense of a numerical totality, and it is not the case that it is individuals who are fundamental and they merely influence society. Rather, society is a real and unique compound of individuals (of course, it is different from natural compounds in which individual elements totally lose their independent identity). In this kind of composition, individuals, who retain their separate wills and independence, share in a single self. Every member has a feeling of possessing two selves; sometimes it is conscious of the individual self and sometimes of the social self. According to some sociologists society reaches self-consciousness in the individual; that is, society is conscious of its being in the individual being.

The sufis and gnostics hold a similar view. William James also has a similar view. With certain, a difference, the gnostics believe in a kind of unity among the souls and hold that the real self is the universal self. They say that man mistakenly considers his own as a distinct self and they ultimately reduce the real self to God, believing that the individual self is nothing more than a manifestation of that real self. It is as if there were a universal spirit that reveals itself in different individuals and all these selves derive from the one Divine self.



William James also arrived at the same conclusion through psychological experiences. He holds that there is an inner connection between individual selves of which they are often unaware. One who purifies his self can get to know the contents of consciousness of other selves through that inner connection (like wells that are connected to each other under the ground while they are separate on the surface). This connection stems from their union with the Divine source. But sociologists are of the view that individuals on merging in society develop a social self which is a real cultural entity. Sometimes man is conscious of this self which is not his individual self but a universal social self. Accordingly man has two kinds of activities, those motivated by individual motives and others prompted by social motives.

According to the first theory man has dual motives, one of which is directed to serves his own self and the other to serve others. According to the second theory man has two selves and two sets of feelings: the individual self and feeling which serve the individual self and another self and feeling which serve the collective self. A moral act is one which is not motivated by the individual self but by the collective self. The collective self is permanent and universal. The conclusion that follows from the second theory is that every action that stems from the collective self is a moral act and that which stems from the individual self is not moral in nature. Of course, the instances of this principle may

vary, but in any case this can be a universal and permanent principle.

### Third Theory

There is a third theory according to which it is impossible that man should do anything which is unrelated to the domain of his self and has no relation to his personality, being exclusively in the service of something external and without being related to the realm of his being. Man, however, has two selves, higher and lower. That is, man is a being with dual aspects. In one aspect he is an animal like other animals and in the other he has a higher reality. It is amazing why 'Allamah Tabataba'i did not advance such a view, for it is consistent with his own principles including those relating to ethics. When we speak of 'man's nature,' we mean man's reality, not merely his physical nature. Man has an ontological reality and his emotional being is subordinate to that reality. The ontological being of man on one plane consists of his animal being and on a higher plane of his spiritual being.

Man completely realizes this higher self in himself or rather considers it his more original self. When animal needs conflict with his judgement based on reason and will and he wishes to subject his animal needs to his reason there may be two kinds of consequences. At times he succeeds and at other time he fails. For instance, in the matter of food and its quantity, reason has its

own judgement whereas his appetite requires something else. When man yields to his appetite he has a feeling of defeat, and when he overcomes his appetite he feels victorious, while in reality he has neither been defeated by anyone nor has he been victorious over anyone. Here one aspect of his existence is dominated by another aspect. Apparently, he should feel either defeated or victorious in both cases, for both belong to the realm of his existence. But practically we see that it is not so. When reason dominates over appetite, he has a feeling of victory and when appetite overcomes reason he feels defeated. That is because his real self is the one associated with reason and will, and his animal aspect constitutes his lower self. Actually the lower self forms a prelude to his real self. If we believe in such a duality in man's being then we can justify ethical principles in the following manner.

Man has certain perfections by virtue of his spiritual self. These perfections are real and not conventional, for man is not only body but soul as well. Any act that is consistent with man's spiritual perfection is valuable, and any act that is irrelevant to the higher aspect of our soul is an ordinary and mediocre act.

I agree with the 'Allamah, Russell, and others that good and bad, ought and ought-not derive from man's likes and dislikes. But the question is: the likes or dislikes of which self are to taken as the criterion, those of the higher self or those of the lower self?

Moral value arises if it is the higher self that likes. This is the reason why ethics is felt to have a higher station. That man sees one aspect of his existence and acts pertaining to it as possessing sublimity is not a mental construct or convention. Rather, that is because he feels that aspect to be a more perfect and stronger aspect of his being. All his perfections derive from that aspect of his existence and its intensity, and all defects derive from its weakness.

In accordance with this approach, virtues like honesty, truthfulness, kindness, mercy, beneficence and the like are notions which have affinity to the higher self. The philosophers have also said that practical wisdom relates to voluntary acts from the viewpoint of being more perfect and excellent. They relate the matter ultimately to the soul, and maintain that the human soul possesses two kind of perfections: theoretical and practical. Theoretical perfection of soul lies in the knowledge of the realities of the world and the higher virtues are considered practical perfection of the soul. That is, they develop the soul practically and brings about a harmony in its relation with the body and pave the way for the real perfection of the soul.

Here we reach a most significant Islamic principle which has not been discussed by the philosophers. That principle is as follows: man has an innate nobility and sublimity which is the same as his spiritual being and the Divine breath. Subconsciously

he senses that dignity within himself. In confrontation with actions and habits he ascertains whether they are compatible with his innate nobility or not. When he feels that there is a compatibility and harmony, he regards it as good and virtuous, otherwise as evil and vicious. In the same way that animals are guided by instinct to what is beneficial or harmful for them, the human soul has perfections transcending nature and some actions and habits are compatible with those perfections.

Universal values relating to good and evil, oughts and ought-nots may be justified in the following manner: Human beings are created alike in respect of that in which their spiritual perfection lies, with similar and uniform likes and viewpoints. Although physically and naturally all men live in different conditions and situations and with varying physical needs, but they are equally situated in respect to their spiritual perfection. Inevitably, in that domain likes and dislikes and notions of what is good and evil assume a uniform, universal and permanent aspect. All moral virtues, whether individual or social, such as patience and the like, can be explained from this viewpoint. The two theories mentioned earlier can explain only social values like self-sacrifice, helping others, etc., but they cannot explain values like patience, fortitude and so on. The last theory on the contrary can explain all moral values. Though I agree with the view that all perceptions of good and evil signify a thing's relation with its

perfection, nevertheless such perceptions of good and evil can be universal and permanent.

# **'Ashura' - History and Popular Legend**

*Ustad Shaheed Murtadu Mutahhari*

*Translated from Farsi by 'Ali Quli Qara'i*

## **First Sermon**

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ بَارِي الْخَلَائِقِ أَجْمَعِينَ وَالصَّلَاةُ وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَى عَبْدِ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَخَبِيئِهِ وَصَفِيِّهِ، سَيِّدِنَا  
وَنَبِيِّنَا وَمَوْلَانَا أَبِي الْقَاسِمِ مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَعَلَى آلِهِ الطَّيِّبِينَ الطَّاهِرِينَ الْمُغْصُومِينَ.  
أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ:  
فَبِمَا نَقْضِهِمْ مِيثَاقَهُمْ لَعَنَّاهُمْ وَجَعَلْنَا قُلُوبَهُمْ قَاسِيَةً يُحَرِّفُونَ الْكَلِمَ عَنْ مَوَاضِعِهِ وَنَسُوا حَظًّا مِمَّا ذُكِّرُوا بِهِ.

***In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful***

*All Praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of the worlds and the Maker of all creation, and may Peace and benedictions be upon His servant and messenger, His beloved and elect, our master, our prophet, and our sire, Abul Qasim Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his pure, immaculate, and infallible Progeny.*

*I seek the refuge of Allah from the accursed Satan*

*So for their breaking their compact We cursed them and made their hearts hard; they would pervert the words from their meanings, and they forgot a portion of what they were reminded of. (5:13)*

Our discussion here concerns the misrepresentations (*tahrifat*) relating to the historic event of Karbala'. There have occurred various kinds of distortions in recounting the details of this great event. We shall carry out this discussion in four parts. The first will deal with the meaning of *tahrif* and its various existing forms, while pointing out that such misrepresentations have occurred in the [popular] accounts of the historic episode of 'Ashura'. The second part deals with the general factors responsible for *tahrif*, that is, the causes which commonly lead to the distortion of events and issues in the world. Why do men misrepresent and distort events, issues, and, occasionally, personalities? In particular, what factors have played a distorting role in the narrative of the episode of Karbala'? The third part consists of an explanation concerning the distortions that have crept into the narratives of this historic event. The fourth part deals with our duty, that of the scholars and the Muslim masses, in this regard.

The first part of this discussion is about the meaning of *tahrif*. What does *tahrif* mean? The Arabic word *tahrif* is derived



from *harrafa* [meaning, to slant, incline, alter, distort, misconstrue] which means to make something depart from its original or proper course and position. In other words, *tahrif* is a kind of change and alteration, though it includes a sense not possessed by mere change and alteration. If you do something that prevents a sentence, message, verse, or passage from conveying the meaning that it ought to convey and gives it some other sense, you have subjected it to *tahrif*. For instance, you make a statement before someone. Elsewhere he quotes you, and later on you are told that so-and-so has reported that you have made such a statement. You find out that what you had said was very different from what he has reported. He has interpolated your statement, deleting words which conveyed your intent and adding others on his own account, with the result that your statement have been distorted and totally altered. Then you would say that this person has misrepresented your statement. Especially, if someone tampers with an official document, he is said be guilty of causing *tahrif* in it. These examples were meant to elucidate the meaning of the term *tahrif*, and it does not need any further explanation or clarification. Now we shall take up the different forms of *tahrif*.

There are various kinds of *tahrif*, the most important of which are *tahrif* in words and *tahrif* of meaning. *Tahrif* of wording occurs when the literal form of a statement is changed.

For instance, when words and phrases are deleted or added to a statement or the sequence of sentences is altered in such a manner as to change its meaning. In this case *tahrif* occurs in the outward form and wording of a statement

*Tahrif* of meaning occurs when one does not change the words, which remain in their original form, but the statement is interpreted in a manner that is contrary to the intent of its speaker. It is interpreted in such a manner as to express one's own intent, not that of its author.

The Noble Qur'an employs the term *tahrif* specifically in relation to the Jews. A study of history shows that they have been the champions of *tahrif* throughout the course of history. I don't know what kind of race this is that has such an amazing penchant for misrepresenting facts! Accordingly they always take up professions in which they can distort and misrepresent events. From what I have heard, the world's well-known news agencies, which are perpetually quoted by the radios and newspapers, are exclusively in the hands of the Jews. Why? Because they can report the events as they wish. How amazing is the Qur'an statement about them! This characteristic of the Jews, the tendency for *tahrif*, is considered a racial trait by the Qur'an. In one of the verses of the Sura al-Baqarah, the Qur'an declares:

أَفَتَطْمَعُونَ أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا لَكُمْ وَقَدْ كَانَ فَرِيقٌ مِنْهُمْ يَسْمَعُونَ كَلَامَ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ يُحَرِّفُونَهُ مِنْ بَغْدٍ مَا عَقَلُوا وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ.

*Are you then eager that they (i.e. the Jews) should believe in you, while a party of them had heard Allah's word, and then consciously misinterpreted it, after they had understood it, and did that knowingly? (2:75)<sup>1</sup>*

This means, 'O Muslims, have you pinned your hopes on their telling you the truth? They are the same people who would go along with Moses, and hear God's pronouncements. But by the time they returned to their people's midst to recount what they had heard, they would twist it out of shape.' The *tahrif* that they would carry out was not for the reason that they did not understand and so altered what they reported. No! They are an intelligent people and they understand matters the issues very well. But despite the fact that they understand what they have heard they would recount them in a distorted manner for the people. This is what *tahrif* is, that is, distorting and twisting things out of their original shape-and they carried out *tahrif* even in Divine scriptures!

In this context, in most of the cases the Qur'an uses the very term *tahrif* or expresses the matter in some other manner. However, the exegetes have pointed out that the Qur'anic reference to *tahrif* in this context includes *tahrif* in wording as well as in meaning. That is, some of the instances of corruption that have occurred [in the scriptures at the hands of the Jews] relating to the wording and some of them relate to the meanings

and interpretation. As this involves a digression from my main topic, I do not wish to discuss this matter any further.

There is a story which would not be out of place here. One of the scholars used to recount that once during the day of his youth a *maddah*<sup>2</sup> from Tehran was visiting Mashhad. During the day he would stand in the Gawharshad Mosque or in the courtyard of the shrine and recite verses and eulogies. Among things that he recited was the famous ghazal ascribed to Hafiz:

ای دل غلام شاه جهان باش و شاد باش      پیوسته در حمایت لطف اله باش  
قبر امام هشتم سلطان دین رضا      از جان بیوس و بر در آن بارگاه باش

O heart! Be slave of the world's King and rejoice!  
Forever dwell in the shelter of God's grace!  
Embrace the tomb of Reza, the Eighth Imam,  
From the heart's depth, and cling to the threshold of his shrine  
(*bargah*).

This gentleman, in order to have some fun with him, had approached him and said to him, "Why do you recite this verse wrongly? It should be read like this..."

قبر امام هشتم سلطان دین رضا      از آن بیوس و بر در آن بارگاه باش

Which means, as soon as you reach the shrine you must throw yourself down like a bundle of straw (*bar-e kah*) is rolled off the back of an ass. Thereafter, whenever the poor *maddah* recited these verses, he would say *bar-e kah* instead of *bargah*

and at the same time throw himself down on the ground! This is what *tahrif* does!

Here I must point out that *tahrif* also differs in respect of the subject involved. There is a time when *tahrif* occurs in an ordinary speech, as when two persons misrepresent each other's words. But there are times when *tahrif* takes place in a matter of great significance to society, such as when there is misrepresentation of eminent personalities. There are personalities whose words and deeds represent a sacred authority for the people and whose character and conduct is a model for mankind. For instance, if someone were to ascribe to Imam 'Ali (A.S.) a statement that he did not make or something that he had not meant to say, that is very dangerous. The same is true if a characteristic or trait is ascribed to the Prophet (S.A.W.) or one of the Imams (A.S.) when in fact they had some other qualities, or when *tahrif* occurs in a great historic event which serves as a moral and religious authority and as a momentous document from the viewpoint of society's norms and is a criterion in matters of morality and education. It is a matter of incalculable importance and entails a crucial danger when *tahrif* - whether in respect of words or meaning - occurs in subjects which are not of the ordinary kind.

There is a time when someone tampers with a verse of Hafiz or makes interpolations in an animal fable. This is not so

important, though, of course one should not tamper with books of literary value.

One professor wrote a paper about *Mush-o gorbeh* ("The Cat and the Mouse"), which is a book of considerable literary value. He had found that it had been victim of so many interpolations, changes of wording, addition and deletion of verses, as to be beyond reckoning. There, he remarks that in his opinion no nation in the whole world is so untrustworthy as the Iranians who have made such extensive unauthorized interpolations in works belonging to their literary heritage. The same is true of *Rumi's Mathnawi*. God knows how many verses have been appended to the *Mathnawi*! For instance, there is a fine couplet in the original versions of the *Mathnawi* about the power of love. It says:

از محبت تلخها شیرین شود      و ز محبت مسها زرین شود

Love sweetens matters bitter, Love turns bronze into gold.

That is a sensible thing to say: love is something that turns even the bitter aspects of life into ones that are sweet and pleasant. Love, like an elixir, transforms the bronze of man's being into gold. Then others came and added verses to this one, without bothering for pertinence or aptness in respect of analogy. For instance, they said: 'Love turns a serpent into an ant,' or that 'love turns the roof into a wall,' or 'love turns a musk-melon into a water-melon'! These analogies have no relation at all to the

water-melon"! These analogies have no relation at all to the theme. Of course such a thing should not happen, but these interpolations do not harm a society's life and felicity and do not cause deviance in its course. But when *tahrif* occurs in things that relate to the people's morality and religion, it is dangerous, and this danger is incalculable when it occurs in documents and matters that constitute the foundations of human life.

The event of Karbala' is, inevitably, an event possessing great social meaning for us, and it has a direct impact on our morality and character.

It is an event that prompts our people, without anyone compelling them, to devote millions of man-hours to listening to the related episodes and to spend millions of tumans (Iranian currency) for this purpose. This event must be retold exactly as it occurred and without the least amount of interpolation. For if the smallest amount of interpolation takes place at our hands in this event, that would distort it, and instead of benefiting from it we would definitely suffer harm.

Now my point is that we have introduced thousands of distortions in retelling the narrative of 'Ashura', both in its outward form, that is, in respect of the very episodes and issues relating to the major events and the minor details, as well as in respect of their interpretation and meaning. Most regrettably, this event has been distorted both in its form and content.

At times a distorted version has at least some resemblance to the original. But there are times when distortion is so thorough that the corrupted version has not the least resemblance to the original: the matter is not only distorted, but it is inverted and turned into its antithesis. Again I must say with utmost regret that the misrepresentations that have been carried out by us have all been in the direction of degrading and distorting the event and making it ineffective and inert in our lives. In this regard both the orators and scholars of the *ummah* as well as the people have been guilty, and, God willing, we will elucidate all these matters.

\* \* \*

Here I will cite examples of some of the distortions that have occurred in the outer form of this event and the concoctions that have grown around it. The topic is so vast as to be beyond expression. It is so vast that should we attempt to collect all the unfounded narratives it will perhaps take several volumes of 500 pages each.

*Marhum* Hajji Mirza Hussain Nuri, may God elevate his station, was the teacher of such figures as *marhum* Hajj Shaykh 'Abbas Qummi, *marhum* Haji Shaykh 'Ali Akbar Nehawandi and *marhum* Hajj Shaykh Muhammad Baqir Birjandi. He was a very extraordinary man and a *muhaddith* (scholar of *hadith*) with an unparalleled command of his field and a prodigious memory. He



was a man of fine spirituality with a highly fervent and passionate faith. Although some of the books that he wrote were not worthy of his station<sup>3</sup>- and for this reason he earned the reproach of his contemporary scholars- but in general his books are good, especially the one that he wrote on the topic of the *minbar* (pulpit), entitled *Lu'lu' wa marjan*. Though a small book, it is an excellent work in which he speaks about the duties of those who deliver sermons and recount for the mourners the narrative of Karbala' from the *minbar*. The entire book consists of two parts.

One part is about the sincerity of intention and purpose, as one of the requirement for a speaker, orator, sermonizer, and *rawdeh-khwan*<sup>4</sup> is that the motive of someone who relates the narrative of 'Ashura' should not be greed or attainment of pecuniary gain. How well he has discussed this topic!

The second requirement is honesty and truthfulness. Here, he elaborates on the topic of false and true narration, discussing various forms of lying in such a thorough-going manner that I do not think there is any other book which deals with lying and its various form in the way that it does, and perhaps there is no such other book in the whole world. In it he exhibits a marvelous learning and scholarship.

In this book, that great man mentions several examples of falsehoods that have become prevalent in narratives of the historic event of Karbala'. Those which I will mention are all or

mostly the same things that the *marhum* Haji Nuri has lamented about. This great man even says explicitly, "Today too we must mourn Hussain, but there are tragedies which have befallen Hussain in our era which did not occur in the past, and they are all these falsehoods that are said regarding the event of Karbala' and which no one opposes! One must shed tears for the sufferings of Hussain ibn 'Ali, not for the sake of the swords and spears that struck his noble body on that day, but on account of these falsehoods." In the book's introduction he writes that an eminent scholar from India had written him a letter complaining about the false narratives that are recited in India, and asking him to do something or to write a book to stop the fictitious narratives that were current there. Then he remarks: "This Indian scholar has imagined that the *rawdakhwans* tell false stories when they go to India. He does not know that the stream is polluted from its very source. The centre of false *rawdahs* are Karbala', Najaf and *Iran*, that is, the very centres of Shi'ism."

\* \* \*

Now as a sample, I will cite some instances of *tahrif*, of which a few relate to the events that occurred before 'Ashura', some that occurred during the Imam's way, some during the days of his final halt at Karbala' in the month of Muharram. I will also mention some of them that relate to the days of his family's

captivity and some about the Imams who lived after the event of Karbala'. However, most of them will relate to the day of 'Ashura' itself. Now I will give two examples of each of them.

It is essential to mention a point at first, and that is that the people are responsible in all these cases. You folks who attend the majalis<sup>5</sup> sessions imagine that you have no responsibility in this regard, and think that it is only the speakers who are responsible. The people have two major responsibilities. The first is that of *nahy 'anil-munkar* (forbidding what is wrong) which is obligatory for all. When they find out and know - and most of the time they do know! - that a narrative is untrue, they should not sit in that gathering. It is forbidden to sit in such gatherings and one must protest against them. Secondly, they must try to get rid of the eagerness and expectation which the hosts as well as the audience attending the *majalis* have for the *majlis* to become fervid, that there should be impassioned mourning and the *majlis* should get feverish with cries of the mourners. The poor speaker knows that if he were to say only things that are true and authentic, the *majlis* would not get into a frenzy and the same people will not invite him again. Hence he is compelled to add something.

The people should get this expectation out of their heads and refrain from encouraging the kind of fictitious narratives which kill the soul of Karbala' but work up the mourners into a

frenzy. The people should hear the true narrative so that their understanding and level of thinking is elevated. They should know that if a sentence creates a tremor in one's souls and attunes it with the spirit of Hussain ibn 'Ali and, as a result, one small tear were to come out of one's eyes, it is really a precious station. But tears drawn by the scenes of mere butchery, even if a deluge, are worthless.

They say that in one of the towns there was an eminent scholar who had some concern for the faith and who protested against these falsehoods which are uttered from the *minbar*. He would say, "What are these abominable things that they say on the *minbar*?" One *wa'iz* said to him, "If we don't say these things we will have to shut down our shops right away!" That gentleman replied, "These are mendacity and one must not utter them." By chance, some days later this gentleman himself happened to host a *majlis* in his mosque and he invited the same *wa'iz*; to make the *rawdah*. But before his taking his seat on the *minbar* the host said to the *wa'iz*, "I want to hold a model *majlis* in which nothing is said except the true narrative. Make it a point not to recount any episode except out of the reliable books. You shouldn't touch any of that abominable stuff!" The *wai'z* replied, "The *majlis* is hosted by you. Your will, will be done." On the first night, the gentleman himself sat there facing the *qiblah* in the prayer niche, close to the *minbar*. The *wai'z*; began his sermon, and when the

time came to recite the tragic narrative, as he had committed himself to recite nothing but the true accounts, the *majlis* remained unmoved and frozen as he spoke on. The gentleman was now upset. He was the host of the *majlis* and he thought about what the people would say behind his back. The women would certainly say, "To be sure, the Aqa's intent was not sincere, and so the *majlis* was a fiasco. Had his intentions been good and were his motives sincere the *majlis* would have been rocked with the howls and groans of mourners crying their eyes out. He saw that it would all end up in a loss of face. What should he do? Quietly, he signaled to the *wai'z*, "Get a bit of that abominable stuff!"

The expectation of the people that the *majlis* should go wild with mourning is itself a source of falsehoods. Accordingly, most of the fabrications that have occurred have been for the purpose of drawing tears, nothing else.

I have heard this story repeatedly, and you too must have heard it. Hajji Nuri also mentions it. They say that one day 'Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, may Peace be upon him, was delivering a sermon from the *minbar*. Suddenly Imam Hussain (A.S.) said, "I am thirsty", Imam 'Ali said, "Let someone bring water for my son." The first person to get up was a little boy, Abu al-Fadl al-'Abbas (A.S.). He went out and got a jar of water from his mother. When he returned carrying the jar on his head, his head was drenched in water as it spilled from the sides. This story

is narrated in its elaborate detail. Then, when the Commander of the Faithful's eyes fell on this scene, tears flowed from his eyes. He was asked why he was crying. He told them that the ordeals that this young son of his would face had come to his mind. You know the rest of the story, which serves the purpose of a point of departure for switching to the tragic scenes of Karbala'. Hajji Nuri has an excellent discussion at this point. He writes, "Now that you say that 'Ali was delivering a sermon from the *minbar*, you should know that 'Ali spoke from the *minbar* and delivered sermons only during the period of his caliphate. Hence, the episode must have occurred in Kufah. At that time Imam Hussain (A.S.) was a man of about thirty-three years." Then he remarks, "Is it at all a sensible thing for a man of thirty-three years to say all of a sudden, in a formal gathering while his father is delivering a sermon. 'I am thirsty!' 'I want water!' If an ordinary man does such a thing, it would be considered ill-mannered of him. Moreover, Hadhrat Abu al-Fadl, too, was not a child at that time but a young man of at least fifteen years." You see how they have fabricated the story! Is such a story worthy of Imam Hussain? Aside from its fictitious character, what value does it have? Does it elevate the station of Imam Hussain (A.S.) or does it detract from it? It is definitely detracting to the dignity of the Imam, as it ascribes a false act to the Imam and detracts from his station by bringing the Imam down to the level of a most ill-

mannered person who, at a time when his father-a man like 'Ali-is delivering a sermon, feels thirsty and instead of waiting for the session to be over, suddenly interrupts his father's sermon to ask for water.'

Another example of such fabrications is the story of a messenger who has brought a letter for Abu 'Abd Allah (A.S.) and he awaits a reply. The Imam tells him to come after three days and collect the reply. After three days on inquiring he is told that the Imam was departing the same day. He says to himself, "Now that he is setting out, let us go and watch the majesty and glamour of the prince of the Hijaz. He goes and there he sees the Imam, together with other Hashimis among men, seated on splendid chairs. Then the camels are brought bearing the litters draped in silk and brocade. Then the ladies emerge and with much honor and ceremony they are escorted into these litters. This description continues in this vein until they make the digression to switch to the scene of the eleventh day of Muharram, to compare the glamour and honor of this day with the sorry state of the womenfolk on the latter day. Haji Nuri calls such descriptions into question. He says, "It is history which says that when Imam Hussain (A.S.) left Madinah he recited this Qur'anic verse:

فَخَرَجَ مِنْهَا خَائِفًا يَتَرَقَّبُ

[He left it in the state of fear and concern.] (28:21)

That is, he likened his own departure to that of Moses, son of 'Imran, when he fled for the fear of the Pharaoh.

قَالَ عَسَىٰ رَبِّي أَن يَهْدِيَنِي سَوَاءَ السَّبِيلِ

[He said, "It might be that my Lord will guide me to the right path. "](28:22)

The Imam had departed with a most simple caravan. Does the greatness of Imam (A.S.) lie in his sitting, for instance, on golden chairs? Or does the greatness of his family and womenfolk lie in their using litters draped in silk and brocade, or their possessing fine horses and camels and a retinue of lackeys and servants?!

Another example of *tahrif* in the accounts of 'Ashura' is the famous story of Layla, the mother of Hadrat 'Ali' Akbar, a story that is not supported even by a single work of history. Of course, 'Ali' Akbar had a mother whose name was Layla, but not a single historical work has stated that Layla was present at Karbala'. But you see how many pathetic tales there are about Layla and 'Ali' Akbar, including the story of Layla's arrival at 'Ali Akbar's side at the time of his martyrdom. I have heard this story even in Qum, in a *majlis* that had been held on behalf of Ayatullah Burujerdi, though he himself was not attending. In this tale, as 'Ali Akbar leaves for the battlefield the Imam says to Layla, "I have heard from my grandfather that God answers a mother's prayer for the sake of her child. Go into a solitary tent, unfurl your locks and



pray for your son. It may be that God will bring our son safe back to us."

First of all, there was no Layla in Karbala' to have done that. Secondly, this was not Hussain's logic and way of thinking. Hussain's logic on the day of 'Ashura' was the logic of self-sacrifice. All historians have written that whenever anyone asked the Imam for leave to go to battlefield, the Imam would at first try to restrain him with some excuse or another that he could think of, excepting the case of 'Ali Akbar about whom they write:

فاستاذن في القتال آباء فاذن له

There at he asked his father's permission to go forth to fight, and he gave him the permission<sup>6</sup>

That is, as soon as 'Ali Akbar asked for permission, the Imam told him to depart. Nevertheless, there is no dearth of verses which depict the episode in quite a different light, including this one:

خیز ای بابا از این صحرا رویم      نک بسوی خیمه لایلا رویم

Rise, O father, let us leave this wilderness,

Let us go now to Layla's tent.

Another case relating to the same story, which is also very amazing, is the one that I heard in Tehran. It was in the house of one of the eminent scholars of this city where one of the speakers narrated the story of Layla. It was something which I had never heard in my life. According to his narrative, after Layla went into

the tent, she opened the locks of her hair and vowed that if God were to bring 'Ali Akbar back safely to her and should he not be killed in Karbala' she would sow basil (*rayhan*) all along the way from Karbala' to Madinah, a distance of 300 parasangs. Having said this, the narrative began to sing out this couplet:

نَذَرُ عَلَى لَيْلَى عَادُوا وَإِنْ رَجَعُوا      لَا زُرْعَنَ طَرِيقَ التَّغْتِ رَيْحَانَا

I have made a vow, were they to return,

I will sow basil all the way to Taft!

This Arabic couplet caused me greater surprise as to where it came from. On investigating I found that the Taft mentioned in it is not Karbala' but a place related to the famous love legend of Layla and Majnun. Taft was the place where the legendary Layla live. This couplet was composed by Majnun al-'Amiri and sung for the love of Layla, and here this man was reciting it while attributing it to Layla, the mother of 'Ali Akbar, conjuring a fictitious connection with Karbala'. Just imagine, were a Christian or a Jew, or for that matter some person with no religious affiliation, were to be there and hear these things, will he not say what a nonsensical hagiography these people have? He would not know that this tale has been fabricated by that man, but he would say, *na'udubillah*, how senseless were the women saints of this people to vow sowing basil from Karbala' to Madinah!

A worse fabrication is the one mentioned by Hajji Nuri. As you know, in the heat of the battle on the day of 'Ashura', the

Imam offered his prayers hurriedly in the form of *salat al-khawf*<sup>7</sup> and there was no respite even to offer full prayers. In fact, two of the companions of the Imam came to stand in front of him to shield the Imam (against the arrows) so that he may offer two *rak'ahs* of the *salat al-khawf*. The two of them fell from the injuries inflicted under the shower of the arrows. The enemy would not even give respite for offering prayers. Nevertheless, they have concocted a story that the Imam called for a wedding ceremony on this day, declaring, 'It is my wish to see my daughter wedded to Qasim.' Obviously, one cannot take one's wishes to one's grave.

By God, see what kind of things they have attributed to a man like Hussain ibn 'Ali, things the like of which we sometimes hear from persons of a very mediocre character, who express a wish to see the wedding of their son or daughter in their life. And this is said to have occurred at a time when there was hardly any respite even for offering prayers. They say that the Hadhrat said, 'I want to wed my daughter to my nephew here and now, even if it is just an appearance of a wedding.' One of the things that was an inseparable part of our traditional *ta'ziyahs* was the wedding of Qasim, the boy bridegroom. Such an episode is not mentioned in any reliable book of history. According to Hajji Nuri, Mulla Hussain Kashifi was the first man to write this story in a book

named *Rawdat al-shuhada'* and it is totally fictitious. The case here is similar to the one about which the poet says:

پس که بستند بر او برگ و ساز      گر تو بینی شناسیش باز

Many are the appendages that they have clapped upon it,  
You will hardly recognize it when you see it again.

Were the Sayyid al-Shuhada' to come and observe these things (and, of course, he does from the world of the spirit, but were he come into the world of appearance) he will find that we have carved out for him companions that he never had. For instance, in the book *Muhriq al-qulub*- whose author was, incidentally, an eminent scholar and jurist, but who had no knowledge of these matters - that one of the companions to appear out of nowhere on the day of 'Ashura' was Hashim Mirqal, who came bearing an eighteen cubits long spear in his hand. (After all someone had claimed that Sinan ibn Anas - who according to some reports severed the head of Imam Hussain - had a spear sixty cubits long. He was told that a spear could not be sixty cubits. He replied that God had sent it for him from the heaven!) *Muhriq al-qulub* writes that Hashim ibn 'Utbah Mirqal appeared with a spear sixteen cubits long, whereas this Hashim ibn 'Utbah was a companion of Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali and had been killed twenty years earlier.

We have attributed several companions to Hussain ibn 'Ali that he did not have, such as the Za'far the Jinn. Similarly, there

are some names among the enemies that did not exist. It is mentioned in the book *Asrar al-shahadah* that 'Umar ibn Sa'd's army in Karbala' consisted of one million and sixty thousand men. One may ask, where did they come from? Were they all Kufans? Is such a thing possible?

It is also written in that book that Imam Hussain (A.S.) himself personally killed three hundred thousand men in combat. The bomb that destroyed Hiroshima killed sixty thousand people. I calculated that if we assume that a swordsman kills one man every second, it would take eighty-three hours and twenty minutes to massacre a force of three hundred thousand. Later, when they saw that this number of those felled by the Imam did not fit with a day's duration, they said that the day of 'Ashura' was also seventy-two hours long!

Similar things are said concerning Hadhrat Abu al-Fadl, that he killed twenty-five thousand men. I calculated that if one man were killed per second, it would require six days and fifty and odd hours to kill that many. Therefore, we have to admit what Hajji Nuri, this great man, says, that if one wanted to mourn the Imam today and narrate the ordeals of Abu 'Abd Allah, may Peace be upon him, one should lament over these new tragedies, over these falsehoods, which have been incorporated in the accounts of his martyrdom.

Another example relates to the day of '*Arba'in*'. At the time of '*Arba'in*' everyone relates the narrative that leads the people to imagine that the captives of the Imam's family arrived at Karbala' on the day of '*Arba'in*', and that Imam Zayn al-'Abidin met Jabir (ibn 'Abd Allah al-Ansari) there. However, excepting the *Luhuf*, whose author is Sayyid ibn Tawus and who has denied it in his other books, or at least has not confirmed it, such an episode is not mentioned in any other book, nor does it seem very reasonable to believe it. But is it possible to expunge these stories, which are repeated every year, from the people's minds? Jabir was the first visitor to Imam Hussain's grave, and the significance of '*Arba'in*' is also nothing except that it is the occasion for the *ziyarah* of Imam Hussain's tomb. It is not for the renewal of mourning for the Ahl al-Bayt, nor on account of their arrival in Karbala'. Basically, the road to Madinah from Syria is not through Karbala' and the two ways diverge from Syria itself.

What is more painful is that, incidentally, there are few events in history that are as rich as the event of Karbala' from the viewpoint of reliable sources. Formerly I used to imagine that the basic reason for the proliferation of legends in this field is that the actual events are not known to anybody. But when I studied I found that no event of remote past - for instance of a period thirteen or fourteen centuries ago - has as reliable an history as

the event of Karbala'. Reliable Muslim historians have reported the pertinent episodes with trustworthy chains of transmission from the first/seventh and the second/eighth centuries, and their narrations are close and corroborate one another.

\* \* \*

There were certain reasons which were responsible for the preservation of these details in history. One of them, which caused the details of this event to be preserved and its objectives to remain clear, were the many speeches (*khutbahs*) that were delivered during its course. In those days, an oration was what communiqués and press releases are in our era. In the same way that official communiqués issued during wartime are the best historical source, so were orations in these days. Accordingly, there were many of them before the event of Karbala', during, and after it. Individuals from among the Prophet's household made orations in Kufah, Damascus and other places. Basically, their aim by delivering these orations was to inform the people about the episodes as well as to declare the truth of the matter and to spell out the goals. This was itself one of the reason for the events to be reported.

There were also many exchanges, questions and answers, in the event of *Karbala'* and these are recorded in history. They too disclose for us the nature of the occurrences.

*Rajaz* poetry<sup>8</sup> was also recited a lot during Karbala', and, in particular Abu 'Abd Allah (A.S.) himself recited much *rajaz*, and these *rajaz* verses also reveal the character of the confrontation.

There were many letters that were exchanged before and after the episode of Karbala', letters that were exchanged between the Imam and the people of Kufah, between the Imam and the people of Basrah, the letters that the Imam wrote earlier to Mu'awiyah (which indicate that the Imam was preparing for an uprising after Mu'awiyah's death), the letters that the enemies wrote to one another, Yazid to Ibn Ziyad, Ibn Ziyad to Yazid, Ibn Ziyad to 'Umar ibn Sa'd, 'Umar ibn Sa'd to Ibn Ziyad, whose texts are all recorded in the history of Islam.

Hence the developments relating to Karbala' are quite clear and all of them are throughout a matter of great honor and pride. But we have disfigured this shining historic event to such an extent and have committed such a monstrous treachery towards Imam Hussain (A.S.) that if he were to come and see, he will say, 'You have changed the entire face of the event. I am not the Imam Hussain (A.S.) that you have sketched out in your own imagination. The Qasim ibn Hasan that you have painted in your fancy is not my nephew. The 'Ali Akbar that you have faked in your imagination is not my aware and intelligent son. The companions that you have carved out are not my companions.'



We have fabricated a Qasim whose only desire is to become a bridegroom and whose uncle's wish, too, is to have him wedded. Contrast this one with the historical Qasim. Reliable histories report that on the night of 'Ashura' the Imam (A.S.) gathered his companions in a tent whose location, as described by the phrase '*inda qurbil-ma*',<sup>9</sup> was the place where water used to be kept, or near it. There he delivered that very well-known sermon of the night preceding 'Ashura'. I do not want to mention its details here, but, to put it briefly, in this sermon the Imam told them that every one of them was free to depart and leave him to confront the enemy alone. The Imam did not want anybody to stay just for considerations of courtesy or to remain out of compulsion, or even to think that they were obliged to do so by virtue of the allegiance (*bay'ah*) they had given him. Hence he tells them, "You are all free, my companions, members of my family, my sons, and my nephews - everyone - to leave without being liable to anything. They [i.e. the enemy's forces] have nothing against anyone except me. The night is dark. Take advantage of the darkness of the night and depart. They will definitely not stop you." At first, he expresses his appreciation for them and tells them, I am most pleased with you. I do not know of any companions better than mine, and no better relatives than the members of my family."

But all of them told him, in unison, that such a thing was impossible. What answer will they give to the Prophet (S.A.W.) on the Day of Resurrection? What will happen to loyalty, to humanity, to love and attachment? Their ardent responses and their words said on that occasion would melt a heart of stone and are most moving. One of them says, "Is one life worth enough to be sacrificed for someone like you? I wish that I were brought to life seventy times to die seventy time for your sake." Another says, "I would lay down a thousand lives for your sake if I had them." Another says, "If I were to sacrifice my life for you and my body were burnt to ashes and the ashes were cast to wind, and were this done a hundred times, I would still love to die for your sake." The first to speak was his brother Abu al-Fadl, and then the other Hashimis spoke after him. When they had made their statements, the Imam changed the subject and told them about the events of the next day, informing them that they all would be killed. All of them receive it as a great good news.

Now this young man - to whom we are so unjust and think that all that he cherished in his heart was the wish to become a bridegroom - puts a question to the Imam. In reality he expresses his real wish. When a group of elderly men gather in an assembly, a boy of thirteen does not sit in their midst, but reverently stays behind them. It appears that this youth was sitting behind the Imam's elderly companions and was keen to

hear what others said. When the Imam told them that they would all be killed on the next day, this child wondered if he too would be one of them. He thought to himself, "After all I am only a boy." Perhaps the Imam means that only the elderly would be martyred. I am just a minor." Therefore, he turned to the Imam and asked him:

وَأَنَا فِي مَنْ يُقْتَلُ

Will I be among those who will be killed?

Look! See what his wish and aspiration are! The Imam says to him, "Qasim, first let me ask you a question. I will reply after you have answered me." I think the Imam purposefully put this question. With this question he wanted to show to posterity that they shouldn't think that this youth gave his life without awareness and understanding, that they should not imagine that what he cherished was a wish to become bridegroom, that they should not conjure up a wedding for him and be guilty of the crime of distorting his fine character. So the Imam said, "First, I will ask you a question":

كَيْفَ الْمَوْتُ عِنْدَكَ

That is, "My child, my nephew, tell me, how do you regard death and what do you think about getting killed?" He promptly answered.

أَحْلَى مِنَ الْعَسَلِ

"It is sweeter to me than honey!"

That is, "I haven't a desire that should be dearer and sweeter to me!" This is an astounding scene. These are the things that have made this a great and historic event and we should keep it alive! For there will not be another Hyssayn, nor another Qasim ibn Hasan. These are the things that make us give so much value to this event, and if after fourteen centuries we build such a *Hyssayniyyah* as this<sup>10</sup> in their memory and in their name, we have done nothing. Or else the wish to become bridegroom does not oblige one to put in one's time and money, to build *Hyssayniyyahs* or to deliver sermons. But they were the very essence of humanity, the very concrete instances of the Divine purpose as stated in the verse:

إِلَى جَاعِلٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيقَةً

*Surely I will make a vicegerent in the earth (2:30)*

and they stood above the angels.

After getting this answer, the Imam said to him, "My nephew, you too will be killed. But your death will be different from that of others:

بَعْدَ أَنْ تُبْلُوَ بِإِلَاحٍ عَظِيمٍ

*and (it will be) after you have faced a great ordeal.*

Accordingly, when Qasim, after much insistence, received the permission to leave for the battlefield, being very young, there was no armor that was fit for his years, nor a helmet nor

shoes, nor arms. It is written that he wore a turban ('*ammamah*) and this description is given of his appearance:

کانه فلقة القمر

He appeared like a piece of the moon.<sup>11</sup>

This boy was so handsome that when the enemies saw him they described him as a piece of the moon:

بر فرس تندرو هر که ترا دید گفت      برگ گل سرخ را باد کجا می برد

'Where does the wind carry this petal of red rose?'

said whoever that saw you on your fleeting mount.

The narrator says: "I saw that the strap of one of his sandals was untied, and I do not forget that it was his left foot" This shows that he was not wearing boots. They write that the Imam stood near the tents as he held his horse's reins. Evidently he was alert and ready. At once he heard a cry. It was Qasim: "*Ya 'ammah!*" (O Uncle!). They write that the Imam flew on the horse like a hunting falcon. As he arrived by the side of this youth, about two hundred men had surrounded this child. They fled as the Imam attacked, and one of the enemy's men who had dismounted to sever Qasim's head was himself trampled under the hoofs of the horses of his fleeing comrades. The one who is said to have been trampled to death under the hoofs of the horses was one of the enemy's men, not Hadrat Qasim. In any case, when the Imam arrived at Qasim's side, there was so much dust and confusion that nobody could see what was happening. When

the dust settled down, they saw the Imam sitting at Qasim's side with his head in his arms. They heard the Imam utter this sentence:

يعز والله على عمك ان تدعوه فلا يجيبك او يجيبك فلا يتفعل صوتہ

My nephew! By God, it is very hard on your uncle that you should call him and he should not be able to respond, or that he should respond without being able to do anything for you!<sup>12</sup>

It was at this moment that a cry came from this youth and his spirit departed towards its Creator.

O God, may our ultimate end be one that is of felicity. Make us aware of the realities of Islam! Remove from us our ignorance and nescience with Your grace and munificence. Give all of us the ability to act with sincere intentions. Fulfill our legitimate needs and forgive all our dead and pardon them.

## Notes:

1. J. M Rodwell in his translation of the Qur'an (London: Everyman's Library, p 345) makes in a footnote the following remark under this verse: "This is one of the passages which shows great familiarity with the habit of the Jews on the part of Muhammad." [Tr.]
2. The professional *maddah*, himself somewhat of a *rawdah khwan*, though mostly without a clerics training, is someone who recites elegies, verses and even delivers a *rawdah* in the *majalis*, the gatherings that are held for the sake of ceremonial mourning, before the *rawdah e khawn* takes to the *minbar*. [Tr.]
3. This is a reference to his controversial book *Fasl al-Khitab* in which he, contrary to the general belief of Shi'i Imami scholars through the course of history, raised doubts concerning the occurrence of *tahrif* (mainly the occurrence of deletions) in the Qur'an. [Tr.]
4. The *rawdah-khawn*, often a cleric is someone who delivers the *rawdah*, consisting of narratives relating in particular to the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, his family and companions, and in general to the ordeals of Ahl al Bayt, the Prophet's family. *Wa'iz*, *Dhakir*, *Minbari*, etc. are other names for the professional *rawdah-khwan*.
5. The verse pertains to the story of Moses at the time of his flight from Egypt: *So he departed therefrom, fearful and vigilant; he said, 'My Lord, deliver me from the wrongdoers.' And when he turned his face towards Midian, he said, 'It may be that my Lord will guide me on the right way.'* Quran, 28:21-22
6. Ibn Tawus, *al-Luhuf*, p. 47
7. The Shari'ah stipulates certain modifications in the obligatory *salat*, the daily ritual prayers, when offered in conditions of war and danger of the enemy's attack. The *salat* thus offered is referred to as *salat al-khawf*; (see the Quran, 4:101). [Tr.]
8. It was a tradition among the Arab warriors to recite verses during combat and encounter with the enemy on the battlefield. *Rajaz* is the form of poetry composed of such purposes and occasions. [Tr.]
9. *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 44 p. 392, *A'lam al-Wara*, p. 234, al-Shaykh al-Mufid, *Kitab al-Irshad*, p. 231, al-Muqarrim, *Maqatal al-Hussain*, p. 257. Apparently, there was a tent where water-skins used to be kept and stored from the first days of the caravan's halt at Karbala'.
10. This is a reference to the Hussainiyyeh-ye Irshad, in Tehran. *Hussainiyyah* is a building which is at times also used as a mosque but is built mainly with the purpose of holding mourning ceremonies during the months of Muharram and

Safar as well as other occasions relating to anniversaries of the martyrdom of the figures of the Ahl al-Bayt.

11. Ibn Shahr Ashub, *al-Manaqib*, iii, 106, see also *A'lam al-Wara*, 242; *al-Luhuf*, 48; *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol 45 p. 35, al-Mufid's *al-Irshad*, p. 239, al-Muqarrim's *Maqatal al-Hyssayn*, p. 331; and al-Tabari's *Ta'rikh*, vi, 256.
12. Ibn Shahr Ashub, *al-Manaqib*, iv, 107, *A'lam al-Wara*, 243; *al-Luhuf*, 38; *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 45 p. 35, al-Mufid's *Irshad*, p. 239, al-Muqarrim's *Maqatal al-Hyssayn*, p. 332; and al-Tabari's *Ta'rikh*, vi, 257.



## Second Sermon

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ بَارِيءُ الْخَلْقِ أَجْمَعِينَ وَالصَّلَاةُ وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَى عَبْدِ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَحَبِيبِهِ وَصَفِيِّهِ، سَيِّدِنَا وَتَبِيِّنَا وَمَوْلَانَا أَبِي الْقَاسِمِ مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَعَلَى آلِهِ الطَّيِّبِينَ الطَّاهِرِينَ الْمُتَصَوِّمِينَ.

أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ:

فِيمَا تَقْضِيهِمْ مِيثَاقَهُمْ لَعَنَّاهُمْ وَجَعَلْنَا قُلُوبَهُمْ قَاسِيَةً يُخَرِّفُونَ الْكَلِمَ عَنْ مَوَاضِعِهِ وَنَسُوا حَظًّا مِمَّا تَلَكَّرُوا بِهِ.

*In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful*

*All Praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of the worlds and the Maker of all creation, and may Peace and benedictions be upon His servant and messenger, His beloved and elect, our master, our prophet, and our sire, Abul Qasim Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his pure, immaculate, and infallible Progeny.*

*I seek the refuge of Allah from the accursed Satan*

*So for their breaking their compact We cursed them and made their hearts hard; they would pervert the words from their meanings. and they forgot a portion of what they were reminded of. (5:13)*

**W**

e said that the event of 'Ashura' has been subject to *tahrif* and it has occurred both in its outward form as well as its inner content. A consequence of these distortions has been that this great historic document and this great educative source have become ineffectual or less potent, in our lives, leaving, at times, even an opposite effect. All of us have the duty to purge it of the distortions that have polluted this sacred document.

### **The Factors of *Tahrif***

These factors are of two kinds, one of which are of a general nature. That is, there are in general certain factors that lead to the corruption of histories and these are not limited to the event of 'Ashura' alone. For instance, the enemy's motives are themselves a factor that distorts an event. In order to achieve their purposes, the enemies bring about alterations in historical texts or misinterpret them. There are many examples of it, which I do not wish to mention here. All that I would say is that this kind of *tahrif* did play a role in distorting the facts of Karbala', and the enemies did take resort in misrepresenting the uprising of Imam Hussain (A.S.). As usually happens, the enemies accuse sacred movements of causing conflict and division and of disrupting social harmony and peace. The Umayyad regime also made much effort to give such a hue to the Hussaini uprising.

Such propaganda began from the very first day. When Muslim son of 'Aqil arrived in Kufah, Yazid, while sending an order appointing Ibn Ziyad to the governorship of Kufah, wrote: "Muslim, son of 'Aqil, has gone to Kufah and his aim is to disrupt peace and to create social discord and disunity in the Muslim community. Go and suppress him." When Muslim was captured and brought to the *dar al-imarah*, the governor's residency, Ibn Ziyad said to Muslim: "Son of 'Aqil! What was it that brought you to this city? The people here lived in satisfaction and peace. You came and disrupted their peace, causing disunity and conflict

amongst the Muslims." Muslim son of 'Aqil answered in a manly manner and said: "Firstly, I did not come to this city on my own account. It was the people of this city who invited us. They wrote a great number of letters, which are in our possession. In those letters they wrote that your father, Ziyad, who ruled this city for years, had killed its virtuous men and imposed its scoundrels over the virtuous, subjecting them to various forms of tyranny and injustice. They appealed to us to help them establish justice. We have come to establish justice!"

The Umayyad regime did wage much propaganda of this kind, but their misrepresentations did not affect the history of Islam. You will not find a single competent historian in the world who might have said that Hussain ibn 'Ali, *naudhubillah*, (may God forbid) made an unlawful uprising, that he rose to cause conflict and disunity among the people. No. The enemy could not bring about any misrepresentation in [the history of] the event of Karbala'. Most regrettably, whatever *tahrif* has occurred in the event of Karbala' has been at the hands of the friends.

## **The Second Factor**

The second factor is the human tendency towards myth making and for turning facts into legends. This tendency has been at work in all the world's historical traditions. There is a tendency in men for hero worship, which induces the people to fabricate

myths and legends about national and religious heroes.<sup>1</sup> The best evidence of it are the legends that the people have invented around the figures of some geniuses such as Ibn Sina and Shaykh Baha'i. Ibn Sina, undoubtedly, was a genius and was gifted with extraordinary physical and intellectual powers. But these very gifts have led the people to weave out legends about him. For instance, it is said that once Ibn Sina saw a man from a distance of one *parasang* and remarked that the man was eating bread made with oil. They asked him how could he know that the man was eating bread and that it was made with oil. He replied that he saw flies circling the bread, which had made him conclude that there was oil in the bread. Obviously, this is a legend. Someone who can see flies from the distance of one *parasang* will see a bread made with oil much sooner than he would see flies!

Or it is said that once during the time that Ibn Sina was studying at Isfahan he complained that when he gets up in the middle of the night to study, he was disturbed by the noise of the hammering of the coppersmiths of Kashan. They went and made a test. One night they told the coppersmiths of Kashan not to use their hammers. That night, said Ibn Sina, he had slept peacefully and was undisturbed in his study. Obviously this is a legend.

Many such legends have been made about Shaykh Bahi'i as well. Such things are not confined to the event of 'Ashura. However, let the people say what they would about Ibn Sina.

What harm does it do? None! But in respect of individuals who are guides of mankind and whose words and deeds and whose stands and uprisings serve as a model and authority, there should not be any *tahrif* whatsoever in their statements, in their personality, and history.

How many legends have been fabricated by us Shi'is about Amir al Mu'minin 'Ali, (A.S.). There is no doubt that 'Ali (A.S.) was an extraordinary man. No one has doubts about 'Ali's courage which was superior to that of any ordinary human being. 'Ali (A.S.) did not encounter any contestant in battle without felling him to the ground. But does that satisfy the mythmakers? Never! For instance, there is the legend about 'Ali's encounter with Marhab in the battle of Khaybar with all the curious details about the physique of Marhab. The historians have also written that 'Ali's sword cut him into two from the middle. But here they found the opportunity to weave out fables, which are harmful for the faith. It is said that God commanded Gabriel to go immediately to the earth lest 'Ali's sword when it comes down on Marhab should cut the earth into two halves, reaching right down to the Cow and the Fish. Gabriel was told to shield the blow with his wings. Gabriel went and when 'Ali struck the blow with his sword, it slashed Marhab into two halves which had they been put in a balance would have turned out to be exactly equal. However, one of Gabriel's wings suffered injury and he could not

ascend to the heaven for forty days. When at last he arrived in heaven, God asked him as to where he had been all these days. He replied, "O Lord! I was on the earth. You had given me an assignment to go there." He was asked why he had taken so much time to return. Gabriel said, "O God, the blow of 'Ali's sword wounded my wings and I was busy bandaging and healing them all these forty days!" According to another legend 'Ali's sword flew so swiftly and slickly through Marhab's forehead cutting all the way to the saddle that when 'Ali pulled away his sword Marhab himself did not know what had happened (he thought the blow had gone amiss). He jeered at 'Ali, "Was that all of your swordsmanship?!" 'Ali' said to him, "Just move yourself a bit and see." As soon as Marhab made a movement, one half of his body fell on one side of the horse and the other on the other side!

Hajji Nuri, this great man, in his book *Lu'lu wa marjan*, while condemning the practice of fabricating of such legends. writes about legends that some people have put into circulation concerning the valour of Hadhrat Abu al-Fadl al-'Abbas. According to one of them, in the Battle of *Siffin* (in which, basically, it is not known whether he had participated, and even if he did he must have been a boy of fifteen years) he threw a man into the air, then another, and so on up to eighty men, and by the time the last one was thrown up the first one had not yet reached

the ground. Then when the first one came down, he cut him into two halves, then the second and so on to the last man!

A part of the interpolations in the narratives of the event of Karbala' have resulted from the myth-making tendency. The Europeans assert that one finds many exaggerations in accounts pertaining to the history of the East, and there is some truth in what they say. mullah Darbandi writes in his book *Asrar al-Shahadah* that the cavalry of the army of 'Umar ibn Sa'd consisted of six hundred thousand horsemen and twenty million infantrymen - in all a force of one million and six hundred thousand plus all the people of Kufah! Now how large was Kufah? Kufah was a recently founded city and not more than thirty-five years old, as it was built during the time of 'Umar ibn Khattab. It was built at 'Umar's orders as a military outpost for Muslim warriors near the borders of Iran. It is not certain whether the entire population of Kufah during that time was even a hundred thousand. That a force of one million and six hundred thousand could have been assembled on that day and that Hussain ibn 'Ali' should have killed three hundred thousand of them is not at all reasonable. Such figures cast a shadow on the whole event.

It is said that someone once made exaggerated claims about the largeness of the city of Herat in former days. He said, 'Herat was a very big city at one time.' 'How big? he was asked. He said, 'At one time there where in Herat twenty thousand one-eyed

cooks with the name Ahmad selling head and totters stew. Now imagine, how many men there must be in a city, and how many-named Ahmad, and how many one-eyed Ahmads, to have twenty-one thousand one-eyed Ahmads selling head and totters stew!

This myth-making tendency has always been very active; but we must not leave a sacred document to the mercy of myth-makers.

فَإِنْ فِيْنَا أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ فِي كُلِّ خَلْفٍ عَدُوًّا يَنْفُونَ عَنْهُ تَحْرِيفَ الْغَالِينَ وَ النِّحَالَ الْمُبْطِلِينَ وَ تَأْوِيلَ الْجَاهِلِينَ.

There is amongst us, the *Ahl al-Bayt*, in every generation reformers who purge the faith of the perversions of the extremists, of the false beliefs of the falsifiers, and of the misinterpretations of the ignorant.<sup>2</sup>

We have a duty here. Now let anyone say anything he likes about Herat. But is it right that such legends as these should find way into the history of the event of 'Ashura', an event concerning which our duty is to keep it alive and revive its memory every year?

### The Third Factor

The third factor is of a particular nature. The two factors that we have discussed above, that is, the hostile ends of the enemies and the human tendency for conjuring legends and myths, apply to all histories of the world, but there is also a factor



which is specific to the event of 'Ashura' that has led to fabrication of stories.

The leaders of the faith, from the time of the Noble Messenger and the Pure Imams, have commanded in clear and emphatic terms that the memory of Hussain ibn 'Ali must be kept alive and that his martyrdom and ordeals should be commemorated every year. Why? What is the reason underlying this Islamic ordinance? Why is there so much encouragement for and emphasis on visiting the shrine of Hussain ibn 'Ali? We should reflect over these questions. Some might say that it is for the sake of condoling with Hadhrat Zahra' (S.A.) and offering her consolation! But is it not ridiculous to imagine that Hadhrat Zahra' should still need consolation after fourteen hundred years, whereas, in accordance with the explicit statements of Imam Hussain (A.S.) and according to our creed, since his martyrdom Imam Hussain (A.S.) and Hadhrat Zahra have been together in heaven? What a thing to say! Is it correct to think of Hadhrat Zahra as a little child that goes on weeping, even after fourteen centuries, and whom we have to go and console? Such kinds of beliefs are destructive for religion. Imam Hussain (A.S.) established the practical ideology of Islam and he is the practical model for Islamic movements. They (that is the Prophet and Imams) wanted Imam Hussain's (A.S.) ideology to be kept alive.

They wanted Hussain should reappear every year with that sweet, sublime and heroic summons of his and declare:

أَلَا تَرَوْنَ أَنَّ الْحَقَّ لَا يُعْمَلُ بِهِ وَأَنَّ الْبَاطِلَ لَا يُنْهَى عَنْهُ لِيَرْغَبَ الْمُؤْمِنُ فِي لِقَاءِ رَبِّهِ حَقًّا حَقًّا

*Don't you see that what is right and true is not acted upon, and what is wrong and false is not forbidden? [In such conditions] the man of faith should long to meet his true Lord!*<sup>3</sup>

They wanted the words:

الْمَوْتُ أَوْلَى مِنْ رُكُوبِ الْعَارِ

*Death is better than a life saddled with indignity,*<sup>4</sup>

to be kept alive forever, and so also the words:

لَا أَرَى الْمَوْتَ إِلَّا سَعَادَةً وَالْحَيَاةَ مَعَ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا بَرَمًا

*To me death is nothing but felicity, and life with oppressors is nothing but disgrace,*<sup>5</sup>

They wanted such other saying of Imam Hussain (A.S.) to be kept alive:

خُطَّ الْمَوْتُ عَلَى وَلَدِ آدَمَ مَخْطَ الْقَلَادَةِ عَلَى جِيدِ الْفَتَاةِ

*The children of Adam carry the mark of death like, necklaces that adorn the necks of damsels!*<sup>6</sup>

هَيْهَاتَ مِنَّا الذُّلَّةُ

*Far from us is disgrace and indignity!*<sup>7</sup>

They wanted to keep alive the memory of such scenes as that of Imam Hussain's (A.S.) confronting a force of thirty thousand men, in a state when he and his family are faced with a

great ordeal, and declaring in a manly manner - and the world has never seen such a manly personage!

أَلَا وَ أَنَّ الدَّعِيَّ ابْنَ الدَّعِيِّ قَدْ رَكَزَتَيْنِ اثْنَتَيْنِ بَيْنَ السَّلَةِ وَالْذَلَّةِ وَ هَيْهَاتَ مِنَّا الذَّلَّةُ يَا بِيَّ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ لَنَا  
وَرَسُولُهُ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَ حُجُور طَابَتْ وَ طَهَّرَتْ (وَلَا أَنْوَفَ حَمِيَّةٍ وَ لَقُوسَ أَبِيَّةٍ مِنْ أَنْ تُؤْثِرَ طَاعَةَ اللِّئَامِ عَلَى  
مَصَارِعِ الْكِرَامِ)

*Indeed, that baseborn son of a baseborn father has left me only two alternatives to choose from: the sword or disgrace. And far from us is disgrace! It is disdainful to God, His Messenger and the faithful that we should yield to anything of that kind, and those born of chaste mothers and high-minded fathers and possessing a lofty sense of honour disdain that submission to vile men should be preferred to honourable death!<sup>8</sup>*

They wanted to keep alive the formative school of Imam Hussain (A.S.) so that the rays of the Hussaini spirit may breathe life into this community. Its objective is quite clear.

Do not allow the event of 'Ashura' to be consigned to oblivion! Your life, your humanity, and your dignity depend on this event!

You can keep Islam alive only by its means! That is why they have encouraged us to keep alive the tradition of mourning Imam Hussain (A.S.), and very rightly! The institution of mourning Hussain ibn 'Ali has a correct philosophy underlying it, a philosophy which is also extremely sublime. It is fitting that we should do all that we can to endeavor for the sake of this cause,

provided we understand its purpose and goal. Unfortunately some people have not understood it. Without making the people understand the philosophy of Imam Hussain 's (A.S.) uprising and without making them understand the station of Imam Hussain (A.S.), they imagine that if they just came and sat in mourning assemblies and shed tears, without knowledge and understanding, it would atone their sins.

*Marhum* Hajji Nuri mentions a point in the book, *Lu'lu' wa marjan*. That point is the belief of some people that the reward (*thawab*) for mourning Imam Hussain (A.S.) is so great that it is justifiable to employ any means whatsoever for this end. Nowadays a group, which subscribes to the views of Machiavilli in political thought, says that ends justify the means. If the end is a good one, it does not matter what means are used to achieve it. Now these people also say that we have a sacred and exalted goal, which is mourning Imam Hussain (A.S.) and it does not matter what means are used for this end. As the end is a sacred one, it does not matter what the means are: Is it correct to perform *ta'ziyahs* - even *ta'ziyahs* that are vulgar - for this purpose? They ask, 'Do they make the people cry? If they do, there is so problem with such *ta'ziyahs*.' So also there is no problem if we blow trumpets, beat drums, commit sinful acts, make men dress as women, conjure a wedding for Qasim, or fabricate and forge episodes. Such things do not matter in the

tradition of mourning Imam Hussain (A.S.), which is something exclusive. Here lying is forgiven, forgery and fabrication are forgivable, making pictures, and dressing men, as women are pardonable. Here any kind of sinful conduct is forgivable as the end is most sacred! As a consequence of such thinking, some persons have resorted to such *tahrif* and misrepresentation that are stunning.

About ten or fifteen years ago when I was on a visit to Isfahan, I met a great man, *marhum* Hajj Shaykh Muhammad Hasan Najafabadi, may God elevate his station. I recounted to him a *rawdah* that I had heard recently somewhere. It was something, which I had never heard until that time. Incidentally, this man who had delivered that *rawdah*, an opium addict, had made the people weep profusely with that *rawdah* of his. In it he recounted the story of an old woman during the reign of Mutawakkil (the 'Abbasid caliph who persecuted the Shi'ah). The woman had set out with the purpose of making a pilgrimage to the tomb of Imam Hussain (A.S.), which was forbidden at that time and they would cut off the hands of the pilgrims. He went on with the narrative until the point when the old woman is taken and thrown into the river. In that state she cries out for help, calling out, "O Abu al-Fadl al-'Abbas!" As she is about to drown a horseman appears and tells her to catch hold of his stirrup. The woman takes hold of the stirrups but she says, "Why don't you

give me your hand?' The horseman says, "I haven't any hands!" At this point the people wept a lot.

*Marhum* Hajj Shaykh Muhammad Hasan recounted for me the history of this legend. In a place near the bazaar, in the hereabouts of Madrasah Sadr, there used to be held a *majlis* which was one of the major *majalis* of Isfahan and which even the *marhum* Hajjmu'llah Isma'il Khwaju'i used to attend. One day there had occurred there an incident. (It had taken place earlier and he had heard its account from reliable persons.) It involved a well-known *wa'iz*; who himself had recounted it in these words: "One day mine was the last turn to speak from the *minbar*. Other speakers had come and each one of them had exerted his skills to make the people weep. Everyone that came would try to surpass his predecessor and having delivered his *rawdah* would descend from the *minbar* to sit among the audience and watch the art of the succeeding *rawdah-khwan*. This continued until the time of noon. I saw that everyone had tried his prowess and together they had drawn out all the tears that the people could shed. What should I do? I thought for a while, and then and there I made up this story. When my turn came, I went up and related the story, leaving all of them behind. In the afternoon, the same day, while attending another *majlis* in the Char-suq locality, I saw that the one who took to the *minbar* before me related this same story. Gradually it came to be written in books and appeared in print."

The false and wrong notion that the tradition of mourning Imam Hussain (A.S.) is an exception to all norms, that it is justified to use any means to make the people weep, has been a major factor leading to fabrication of legends and *tahrif*.

*Marhum* Hajji Nuri, that saintly man and teacher of *marhum* Hajj Shaykh 'Abbas Qummi, who as confessed by Hajj Shaykh 'Abbas himself as well as others was superior to his pupils, was an extraordinarily learned and pious man. In his book he makes the point that if it is a correct notion that the end justifies the means, then one may also justify the following line of reasoning. One of the Islamic precepts is that bringing delight to the heart of a believer and to do something to make him happy is a greatly commendable act. Such being the case, according to this reasoning, it is justifiable to do backbiting in his presence, as he loves listening to backbiting. And should someone say that it is sinful to do so, the answer will be, "No! The purpose is a sacred one and the backbiting is being done to make a believer pleased and happy!"

*Marhum* Hajji Nuri gives another example. A man embraces a non-mahram woman, which is an unlawful act. We ask him why did you do that? He replies, "I have done it for a believer's delight." The same reasoning can be applied to such unlawful acts as adultery, drinking wine, and sodomy. Isn't this an absurd reasoning? Wouldn't such a notion destroy the

Shari'ah? By God, to think that it is permissible to use any kind of means for making people cry in mourning Imam Hussain (A.S.) is a notion that contradicts everything that Imam Hussain (A.S.) stands for. Imam Hussain (A.S.) was martyred to uplift Islam, as we confess while reciting his *ziyarah*:

أَشْهَدُ أَنَّكَ قَدْ أَقَمْتَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَيْتَ الزَّكَاةَ وَأَمَرْتَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَنَهَيْتَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَجَاهَدْتَ فِي اللَّهِ  
حَقَّ جِهَادِهِ

*I bear witness that you established the prayer, gave zakat  
commanded what is right and forbade what is wrong, and did  
such jihad in the way of God as ought to be done.*<sup>9</sup>

Imam Hussain (A.S.) was killed in order to revive Islamic traditions, Islamic laws and regulations, not in order to create an excuse for the violation of Islamic norms. *Na'udhubillah*, we have changed Imam Hussain (A.S.) into a destroyer of Islam: the Imam Hussain (A.S.) that we have conjured in our imagination is a destroyer of Islam.

In his book Hajji Nuri mentions a story that was related to him by one of the students in Najaf, who originally came from Yazd. "One day," he said, "in my youth I made a journey on foot to Khorasan, going by the road that passes through the desert (*kavir*). In one of the villages of Nayshabur I went to a mosque, as I did not have any place to stay. The prayer leader of the mosque came and led the prayers. Afterwards he went on the *minbar* to make a *rawdah* I was amazed to see the mosque



attendant bring a pile of stones, which he handed over to the prayer leader. When the *rawdah* started, he ordered the lamps to be put out. When the lamps had been put out, he pelted the stones at the audience and there arose cries from the people. When the lamps were lighted, I saw bleeding heads. Their eyes were tearful as they walked out of the mosque. I approached the prayer leader and asked him why he had done such a thing. He said, 'I have tested these people. There is no *rawdah* in the world that will make them weep. As weeping for the sake of Imam Hussain (A.S.) has a great reward and *thawab*, I have found that the only way to make them cry is to throw stones on their heads. This is how I make them weep.' He believed that the end justifies the means. The end was to mourn Imam Hussain (A.S.) though it should involve emptying a pile of stones on the people's heads.

Accordingly, this is a particular factor, which is specific to this historic event, and it has led to much fabrication and *tahrif*.

When one studies history one finds what they have done to this event. By God, Hajji Nuri is right when he says that if we were to weep for Imam Hussain (A.S.) today, we should mourn for him on account of these falsehoods, fabrications and *tahrif*!

There is a well-known book called *Rawdat al-Shuhada'*. whose author wasmullah Hussain Kashifi. According to Hajji Nuri, he was the first to write in his book the stories of Za'far the Jinn and the one about Qasim's wedding. I have read this book. I

used to imagine that it contained only one or two of such cases. But afterwards when I read it I saw that the matter was very much different. This book, which is in Farsi, was compiled about five hundred years ago. mullah Hussain Kashifi was a scholar and learned man. He has authored several books including the *Anwar Suhayli*. His biographical accounts do not indicate whether he belonged to the Ahl Shia fiqh or Ahl Sunnah fiqh. Basically he was a Chameleon: Among the Shia he would pose as a Shia, while amongst the Sunnis he would pass as a Hanafi. He was a native of Sabzawar, a well-known town whose people were staunch Shia. In Sabzawar he would act as an out and out Shia, and at times when he would go to Herat he would give sermons for the Sunnis in their tradition. But in Sabzawar he narrated the tragedies of Karbala'. His death occurred around 910/1504, that is, either at the end of the 9th or the beginning of the 10th century. This was the first book, compiled about five hundred years ago, to be written as an elegiac narrative (*marthiyah*). Earlier the people used to refer to the primary sources. Shaykh Mufid, may God be pleased with him, wrote the *Irshad* and how sound is his narration! If we were to refer to the *Irshad* of Shaykh Mufid we would not stand in need of any other source. Tabari, among Sunni authors, has also written about it. Ya'qubi, Ibn 'Asakir and Khwarazmi have also written. I don't know what this unjust man has done! When I read this book I saw that even the

names are spurious. He mentions names among Imam Hussain 's (A.S.) companions that never existed. He mentions names of the enemy's men, which are also spurious. He has turned the factual accounts of the event into fables.

As this was the first book to be written in Farsi, the orators in mourning assemblies, who were mostly illiterate and could not use the Arabic texts, would take this book and read from it in the mourning sessions. That is why the gatherings that are held nowadays to mourn Imam Hussain (A.S.) are called *rawdeh-khwani*. *Rawdeh-khwani* was not in vogue during the time of Imam Sadiq or Imam Hasan 'Askari, nor it was prevalent during the times of Sayyid Murtada [d. 436/1044] or even Khwajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi [d. 672/1273]. *Rawdeh-khwani* came into vogue since the last five hundred years and it came to be called as such. *Rawdeh-khwani* meant reading from the book *Rawdat al-Shuhada'*, a pack of lies. From the time that this book fell into the hands of the people, no one has bothered to study the actual history of Imam Hussain (A.S.).

Then, about sixty or seventy years ago, there appeared another man, the *marhum* mullah Darbandi. He took all the contents of the *Rawdat Al-Shahuda'* and compiled them together with other material, collecting it all in a book called *Asrar al-Shahadah*. The contents of this book make one lament for the fate of Islam.

Hajji Nuri writes, "We used to attend the lectures of Hajj Shaykh 'Abd al-Hussain Tehrani (who was a very saintly man) and benefited from his teaching. A *sayyid* from Hillah, who was a *rawdeh-khwan*, came to meet him and he showed him a book written about the events of Imam Hussain 's (A.S.) martyrdom (*maqtal*, plural: *maqatil*) to see whether its contents were reliable. This book did not have any beginning or end. Only at one place in it was mentioned the name of a certain mullah of Jabl al-'Amil who was among the pupils of the author of the *Ma'alum al-usul*. *Marhum* Hajj Shaykh 'Abd al-Hussain took the book to examine it.

First he studied the biographical accounts of that scholar and found that such a book had not been attributed to him. Then he read the book itself and found it to be full of falsehoods. He said to that *sayyid*, 'this book is a pack of lies. Don't circulate this book and don't quote anything from it, for it is unlawful to do so. Basically this book has not been written by that scholar and its contents are spurious.' " Hajji Nuri says that the same book fell into the hands of the author of *Asrar Al-Shahadah* and he copied all its contents into his book, from the beginning to the end!"

Hajji Nuri relates another episode, which is rather touching. Once a man came to author of the *Maqami*<sup>10</sup> and said to him, "Last night I saw a horrible dream." "What was it?" he asked him. He said, "I saw that I am biting away flesh from the body of Imam Hussain (A.S.)." The scholar trembled on hearing these

words. He lowered his head and thought for a while. Then he said, "Perhaps you are a *marthiyeh-khwan*?" "Yes, I am," he replied. He said, "Hereafter, either abandon *marthiyeh-khwani* altogether or draw your material from reliable books. You are tearing away the flesh Imam Hussain (A.S.), with these lies of yours. It was God's grace that He showed this to you in a dream."

\* \* \*

If one studies the history of 'Ashura' one will find that it is the most vivid and well documented of histories with plenty of sources. The *marhum* Akhund Khurasani used to say, "Those who are ever after 'new' *rawdahs* should go and read the true accounts, for no one has ever heard them! One should study the addresses of Imam Hussain (A.S.) delivered in Makkah - in the Hijaz as a whole - at Karbala', during his journey, as well as the sermons addressed to his companions, the questions and answers that took place between him and others, the letters that were exchanged between him and other people, the letters that were exchanged between the enemies themselves, in addition to the accounts of those (from among the friends as well the enemies) who were present on the occasion of 'Ashura'. There were three or four persons from among Imam Hussain 's (A.S.) companions who survived, including a slave named 'Uqbah ibn Sam'an, who had accompanied the Imam from Makkah and lived to write the

accounts pertaining to the Imam's troops. He was captured on the day of 'Ashura' but was released when he told them that he was a slave. Humayd ibn Muslim was another chronicler who accompanied the army of 'Umar ibn Sa'd. Of those present on the occasion was Imam Zayn al-'Abidin (A.S.) himself who has recounted all the events. There is no blind spot in the history of Imam Hussain (A.S.).

Hajji Nuri refers to a spurious story that relates to Imam Zayn al-'Abidin (A.S.). According to it when there remained no companion with Hadhrat Abu 'Abd Allah (A.S.), the Hadhrat went into the tent of Imam Zayn al-'Abidin (A.S.) to bid him good-bye. Imam Zayn al-'Abidin (A.S.) asked him, "Father! How did things come about between you and these people? (That is, Imam Zayn al-'Abidin was unaware of what was happening until that time). The Imam said to him, "Son, this matter has ultimately led to a battle." 'What happened to Habib ibn Mazahir?', asked Imam Zayn al-'Abidin. "He was killed," replied the Imam. "How about Zuhayr ibn Qayn?" "He was also killed," replied the Imam. "What happened to Burayr ibn Hudayr?" "He was killed," said Imam Hussain (A.S.). Imam Zayn al-'Abidin continued naming each of his father's companions one after another and the Imam's reply was the same. Then he asked concerning the men of Banu Hashim. "What happened to Qasim ibn Hasan?" What happened to my brother 'Ali Akbar?" "What happened to my uncle Abu al-

Fadl The answer was the same: "He has been killed." This is a fabrication and a lie. Imam Zayn al-'Abidin, *na'udhubillah*, was not so sick and unconscious as not to know what was going on. Historians have written that even in that state of illness he rose from his bed and said to Zainab, "Aunt, bring me my staff and give me a sword." In any case, Imam Zayn al-'Abidin (A.S.) was one of those who were present on the scene and related the accounts of events.

Truly, we should be penitent for these crimes and treacheries that we are guilty of in respect of Abu 'Abd Allah al-Hussain (A.S.), his companions, comrades and members of his family, and for effacing all their achievements. He should do penance and then make effort to derive benefit from this most educative source.

Is there any inadequacy in the life of 'Abbas ibn 'Ali as recounted in the reliable *maqatil* (accounts of martyrdom)? The single point that there was no danger to his own life is enough to be a matter of pride for him. Imam Hussain (A.S.) had also told him, "They are only after me, and if they kill me, they will not have anything against anyone else." At Kufah, when Shimr ibn Dhi al-Jawshan was departing for Karbala', one of those who were present said to Ibn Ziyad that some of his relatives on the mother's side were with Hussain ibn 'Ali. He requested Ibn Ziyad to write a letter granting them amnesty, and Ibn Ziyad wrote it.

Shimr belonged to a clan that had remote ties with the tribe of Umm al-Banin (the mother of Abu al-Fadl). Shimr personally brought this letter of amnesty on the night following the ninth day of Muharram. This wretch approached the camp of Hussain ibn 'Ali and shouted, "Where are my nephews!" (*ayna banu ukhtina?!).*<sup>11</sup> Abu al-Fadl, along with his full brothers, was sitting with Hadhrat Abu 'Abd Allah (A.S.). He remained silent and did not reply, until the Imam said to him, "Answer him, though he be an evil man (*ajibuhu in kana fasiqa*). At the Imam's leave, he answered Shimr, saying, "What do you want?" (*Ma taqul?*). Shimr said, "I have come with some good news for you. I have brought a letter of amnesty for you from the emir, 'Ubayd Allah. You are now free, and you will be safe if you leave now." Abu al-Fadl said to him, "May God damn you and your emir, as well as the letter that you bring. Do you think we will abandon our Imam and brother for the sake of our own safety?"

On the night of 'Ashura', the first person to declare his loyalty towards Abu 'Abd Allah was his brother Abu al-Fadl. Aside from the foolish exaggerations that are often made, that which is confirmed by history is that Abu al-Fadl was a very wise person, valiant and courageous, tall and most handsome. He had been nicknamed 'The Moon of the *Hashimis*.'<sup>12</sup> These things are true. To be sure, he had inherited Ali's courage. The story is also true regarding his mother, that Ali' had asked 'Aqil, his brother, to



propose a woman born of a heroic descent (*waladatha al-fuhulah*)<sup>13</sup> who might give birth to son who would be a warrior and man of valour (*li-talidani farisan shuja'ah*).<sup>14</sup> 'Aqil had suggested Umm al-Banin. So much of it is true. 'Ali's wish was fulfilled in Abu al-Fadl.

According to one of two reports, on the day of 'Ashura' Abu al-Fadl came to the Imam and said, "Dear brother, now give me the permission. This breast of mine is suffocated and I can bear it no more. I want to sacrifice my life for your sake." I don't know the reason why Imam responded to Hadhrat Abu al-Fadl's request in the manner that he did. Abu 'Abd Allah himself knows better. He said, "Brother, now that you want to leave, try to get some water for these children." Hadhrat Abu al-Fadl had already come to receive the nickname *Saqqa* (water carrier), as earlier, on one or two occasions, at nights he had been able to pass through the enemy's ranks to fetch water for the children in Abu 'Abd Allah's camp. It was not the case that they had not drunk any water for three days and nights. Access to water had been closed for three days and nights, but during this time they had been able to get some water on one or two occasions, including the night of 'Ashura', when they had taken bath and washed their bodies. Abu al-Fadl consented.

Now note this majestic scene! What greatness! What valour! What a spirit of understanding and self-sacrifice! A lone

warrior, alone by himself, advances against a host. The number of men who guarded the riverbank was four thousand. He descends along the riverbank and leads his horse into the water (all historians have written this). First, he fills the water skin that he has brought and lays it on his shoulder. He is thirsty. The air is hot and has been fighting. But as he sits on the back of his horse and the horse stands in water reaching up to its stomach, he lowers his hands into water, takes water into them and raises them somewhat towards his sacred lips.

Those who were watching from a distance report that he hesitated for a while. Then they saw that he threw the water back and came out of the river without drinking any. No one knew why Abu Al-Fadl did not drink water there. But when he came out he recited *rajaz* verses, which were addressed to him. Now from these verses they understood why he had not drunk water:

يَا نَفْسُ مِنْ بَعْدِ الْحُسَيْنِ هُوَ بِي قَبْعَةٌ لَا كُنْتُ أَنْ تَكُونِي  
هَذَا الْحُسَيْنُ شَارِبُ الْمَنُونِ وَتَشْرِبِينَ بَارِدَ الْمَعِينِ  
وَاللَّهِ مَا هَذَا فِعَالٌ دِينِي وَلَا فِعَالٌ صَادِقِ الْيَقِينِ

O soul of Abu al-Fadl!

My wish is that you live not after Hussain!

Will you have a drink of cold water?

While there stands Hussain, thirsty, near the tents,

And about to drink the cup of death!

Such is not the way of my faith,

Nor that of one who abides in conviction and truth!<sup>15</sup>

What would become of manliness? Of honor? Of caring love? And of sharing in the hardship of one's dear ones? Isn't Hussain your Imam, and you his follower?

هَذَا الْحُسَيْنُ شَارِبُ الْمَوْتِ وَتَشْرَبِينَ بَارِدَ الْمَعِينِ

While Hussain is about to drink the cup of death, Will you have a drink of cold water?

Never! My faith does not permit me to do that! My loyalty does not allow me to do such a thing! Abu al-Fadl changed his route while returning and now he came through the palm groves. Earlier, he had come by the direct way, but he knew that he now carried a precious trust with him. So he changed his route and all his concern now was to get the water safely to the camp, for it was possible that a single arrow may pierce the water skin and fail his task of bringing the water to its destination. In the mean while they heard that Abu al-Fadl had changed his *rajaz*. It appeared that something had happened. Now he cried out:

وَاللَّهِ إِنْ قَطَعْتُمْ يَمِينِي  
أَنْتِ أُوْحَامِي أَبَدًا عَنْ دِينِي  
وَعَنْ إِمَامٍ صَادِقٍ الْيَقِينِ  
نَجَلُ النَّبِيِّ الطَّاهِرِ الْإِمِينِ

By God!

Even if you sever my right arm,  
I will persist in defending my faith,  
And the Imam, who is the true one, for certain,  
the Prophet's grandson, pure and trustworthy!<sup>16</sup>

That is, by God even if you cut my right arm I will not flinch from defending Hussain. Not much time passed when his *rajaz* changed again:

يا نفسُ لا تَخْشَى مِنَ الْكُفَّارِ      وَأُبَشِّرِي بِرَحْمَةِ الْجَبَّارِ  
مَعَ النَّبِيِّ السَّيِّدِ الْمُخْتَارِ      قَدْ قَطَعُوا بَيْنَهُمْ يَسْرِي

O my soul, fear not the faithless,  
And receive the good news of Almighty's mercy,  
In the company of the Prophet, the Master and the Elect,  
Though, insolently, they should slash my left arm!<sup>17</sup>

These *rajaz* verses signaled that his left arm too had been severed. They write that with characteristic dexterity he somehow turned the water-skin and bent himself over it.

I will not say what happened thereafter, as it is most heart rendering.

It is a custom to recount the account of the ordeals of this great human being on the night of *Tasu'ah* (9th Muharram). Let me add that Umm al-Banin, the mother of Hadhrat Abu al-Fadl was alive at the time of the event of Karbala', though she was in Madinah at the time. She was given the news that all her four sons were martyred at Karbala'. This saintly woman would go to the Baqi' cemetery and mourn over her sons. They write that her elegies were so full of pathos that they brought tears to everyone who heard them, even Marwan ibn Hakam, who was the staunchest of the enemies of the Prophet's family. Sometimes she

would remember all her sons and, at times, especially Abu al-Fadl, the eldest of them, who was senior most of the brothers, both in respect of age as well as in respect of spiritual and bodily merits. I remember one of her two elegies and I will recite them for you. These are the elegiac verses that this grieved mother recited in mourning for her sons (in general, the Arabs recite elegiac verses in a very touching style):

يا مَنْ رَأَى الْعَبَّاسَ كَرَّ عَلَى جَمَاهِرِ النَّقْدِ      وَوَاهٍ مِنْ أَبْنَاءِ حَيْدَرٍ كُلِّ لَيْثٍ ذِي لَبَدٍ  
أَنْهَيْتُ أَنْ ابْنِي أَصِيبَ بِرَأْسِهِ مَقْطُوعٌ يَدٌ      وَتَلَى عَلَى شِبْلِي أَمَالَ بِرَأْسِهِ ضَرْبُ الْعَدَدِ  
لَوْ كَانَ سَيْفُكَ فِي يَدَيْكَ لَمَادَنِي مِنْهُ أَخَذُ

You, who have seen 'Abbas make repeated forays against the base hosts,

And following him were the Lion's sons, each a mighty lion!  
I have been told, my son's head was struck when his arms were cut,  
Alas for my Lion's cub! Did a club fall on his head?

O 'Abbas! None would have dared to approach it,

Was your sword in your hand!<sup>18</sup>

That is, 'O observant eye, tell me, you who have been in Karbala' and watched its scenes and observed the moment when Abu al-Fadl, my son of a lion, with my other lion's cubs following him, attacked that cowardly crowd - tell me is it true what I have been told? They say that when they had cut my son's arms an iron club fell on my dear one's head. Is that true?' Then she says, "Abu al-Fadl! My dear! I know that if you had arms

there wasn't a man in the whole world to have the guts to face you! They had the temerity to do that because your arms had been severed from your body!

لَا حَوْلَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ الْعَلِيِّ الْعَظِيمِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ وَصَلَّى عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ الطَّاهِرِينَ.

**Notes:**

1. During the nights of the 'id of Ghadir, Dr. Shari'ati delivered an excellent lecture on this general human tendency for hero-worship and making of myths and legends, turning historic figures into legendary heroes with extraordinary and superhuman characteristics.
2. Al-Kulayni, Usul al-Kafi. "kitab fadl al-'ilm", p. 32; al-Saffar, Basa'ir al-darajat, p.10.
3. Bihar al-anwar, vol. 44, p. 381; Tuhaf al-'uqul, p. 176; al-Luhuf, 33; al-Khwarazmi's Maqtal al-Hussain, ii, p. 5.
4. Ibn Shahr Ashub, al-Manaqib, iv, p. 110; al-Luhuf, p. 50. Bihar al-anwar, vol. 45, p. 50; al-Irbili, Kashf al-ghummah, ii, 32.
5. Bihar al-anwar, vol. 44, p. 381; Tuhaf al-'uqul, p. 176; al-Luhuf, 33.
6. Bihar al-anwar, vol. 44, p. 366; al-Luhuf, p. 25.
7. Al-Luhuf, 41; Khwarazmi's Maqtal al-Hussain, ii, 7; Ibn 'Asakir, Ta'rikh al-Sham, iv, 333; al-Muqarrim's Maqtal al-Hussain, 287; al-Harrani, Tuhaf al-'uqul, p. 176; Shaykh 'Abbas al-Qummi, Nafs al-mahimun, p. 149, Mulhaqat Ihqaq al-haqq, xi, 624-625.
8. Ibid.
9. Mafatih al-janan, the ziyarah of Imam Hussain (A.S.) for the nights of 'Id al-Fitr and 'Id al-Adha.
10. Marhum Aqa Muhammad 'Ali was the son of marhum Wahid Behbahani and, both of them were great men. Marhum Aqa Muhammad Ali migrated to Kermanshah where he wielded great influence.
11. al-Muqarrim's Maqtal al Hussain, 252, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 44, p. 391, al-Luhuf, 37.
12. al-Muqarrim's al-'Abbas, 81; Ibn Shahr Ashub, al-Manaqib, iv, 108.
13. al-Muqarrim's al-'Abbas, p. 69.
14. Ibsar al-'ayn fi ansar al-Hussain 'alayh al-salam, 26.
15. Yanabi al-mawaddah, ii, 165; Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 45, p. 41.
16. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 45, p. 40.
17. Ibid.
18. Muntaha al-amal, i, 386.

## Third Sermon

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ بَارِيءِ الْخَلْقِ أَجْمَعِينَ وَالصَّلَاةُ وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَى عَبْدِ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَخَبِيِّهِ وَصَلْفِيهِ، سَيِّدِنَا وَتَبِيِّنَا وَمَوْلَانَا أَبِي الْقَاسِمِ مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَعَلَى آلِهِ الطَّيِّبِينَ الطَّاهِرِينَ الْمُغْصُومِينَ.  
أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ:

فِيمَا نَقَضَهُمْ مِيثَاقَهُمْ لَعَانَهُمْ وَجَعَلْنَا قُلُوبَهُمْ قَاسِيَةً يُحَرِّفُونَ الْكَلِمَ عَنْ مَوَاضِعِهِ وَنَسُوا حَظًّا مِمَّا ذُكِّرُوا بِهِ.

*In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful*

*All Praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of the worlds and the Maker of all creation, and may Peace and benedictions be upon His servant and messenger, His beloved and elect, our master, our prophet, and our sire, Abul Qasim Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his pure, immaculate, and infallible Progeny.*

*I seek the refuge of Allah from the accursed Satan*

*So for their breaking their compact We cursed them and made their hearts hard; they would pervert the words from their meanings. And they forgot a portion of what they were reminded of. (5:13)*

**W**

e stated earlier that the history of an event of such greatness as Karbala' has been subject to distortion at our hands both in respect of its external details as well as its meaning. By distortion of outward form we mean the accretions that we have piled up on the corpus of its history, which have obscured its bright and luminous visage and disfigured its beautiful countenance. We cited some instances in this regard.



## Distortions of Meaning

Regrettably this historic event has also been distorted in respect of its meaning, and corruption of meaning is much more dangerous than corruption of external detail. That which has made this great event ineffectual for us is the corruption of meaning, not that of external detail. That is, the evil effect of distortions in meaning is greater than those pertaining to external details.

What is meant by distortion of meaning? Without adding a single word or deleting a single word, it is possible to misinterpret a statement in such a manner that it gives a meaning exactly contrary to its real meaning. I will give just one small example to illustrate this point. At the time that the early Muslims were building the Mosque of Madinah, 'Ammar Yasir was working hard, making an extraordinary amount of sincere effort. Among the reports that are of a definite authenticity is the one that the Noble Messenger (S.A.W.) said to him at the time:

يَا عَمَّارُ تَقْتُلُكَ الْفِتَّةُ الْبَاغِيَّةُ.

'Ammar, you will be killed by the rebellious faction.'

The term 'rebellious faction' (*al-fi'at al-baghiyah*) is Qur'anic, and it occurs in a verse which states that if two faction of Muslims fight one another and one of them is rebellious, one

must take a stand against the rebellious faction and join on the side of the other faction so that the matters are set right.

وَإِنْ طَائِفَتَانِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ اقْتَتَلُوا فَأَصْلَحُوا بَيْنَهُمَا فَإِنْ بَغَتْ إِحْدَاهُمَا عَلَى الْأُخْرَىٰ فَعَاتِلُوا آلِيٰ تَبَغَىٰ  
حَتَّىٰ تَفِيءَ إِلَىٰ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ.

*If two factions of believers fight, make peace between them, but if one of them rebels against the other, fight the one, which is rebellious until, it returns to God's command. (49:9)*

The statement, made by the Noble Messenger concerning 'Ammar, gave him great prestige. Accordingly, during the Battle of Siffin, when 'Ammar fought on the side of Imam 'Ali (A.S.), Ammar's presence in 'Ali's troops was considered a strong point in 'Ali's favour. There were people with a weak faith who, until 'Ammar had not been killed, were not convinced that it was right for them to fight on Ali's side and lawful to kill Mu'awiyah and his soldiers.

But on the day that 'Ammar was killed at the hands of Mu'awiyah's soldiers, suddenly a cry rose from all sides that the Prophet's prophesy had come true. The best evidence of the unrighteousness of Mu'awiyah and his companions was that they were the killers of 'Ammar and the Prophet had informed years ago through his statement that 'Ammar will be killed by a rebellious faction.<sup>2</sup>

On this day it became quite clear that the Mu'awiyah's troops represented the rebellious faction, that is, one which was

unjust and unrighteous, and that justice lay on the side of 'Ali's army. Hence in accordance with the express injunction of the Qur'an one had to join the battle on 'Ali's side and against Mu'awiyah's army. This incident demoralized Mu'awiyah's troops. Mu'awiyah, who always tried to make headway by resorting to cunning and subterfuge, resorted to a misinterpretation. It was not possible to deny that the Prophet had made such a statement concerning 'Ammar, because perhaps there were at least five hundred persons who could bear witness that they had heard this statement from the Prophet himself. Accordingly, it was not possible to deny the fact of the prophesy concerning 'Ammar. The Syrians protested to Mu'awiyah, for it were they who had killed 'Ammar and the Prophet had said that he would be killed by a rebellious faction. Mu'awiyah told them, "You are mistaken. It is true that the Prophet said 'Ammar will be killed by a rebellious faction and army. But it were not we who killed 'Ammar." They said, "He was killed by our warriors." "No," he said, " 'Ammar was killed by 'Ali who brought him here and provided the causes of his death."

'Amr ibn 'As had two sons. One of them was a worldly person like himself. The other one was a youth who was relatively a man of faith and he did not agree with his father's ways. His name was 'Abd Allah. 'Abd Allah was present in a gathering where this sophistry was put into effect. 'Abd Allah

said, "What a false argument that it was 'Ali who has killed 'Ammar, as he was among his troops. If that is so, then it was the Prophet who killed Hamzah, the Doyen of the Martyrs, as Hamzah was killed due to his presence in the Prophet's troops." This enraged Mu'awiyah and he said to 'Amr ibn As, "Why don't you check this ill-mannered son of yours!" This is what is called distortion of meaning.

### **How is the meaning of events and facts distorted?**

Historical events and facts have on the one hand certain causes behind them, and, on the other, they are inspired by certain goals and motives. Misrepresentation of a historical event lies in ascribing to it causes and motives other than what they have actually been, or in attributing to it goals and motives other than what they in fact were. For instance, you visit someone who has recently returned from a pilgrimage to Makkah. The purpose you have in mind is that it is *mustahabb* to visit a hajji and so you go to see him. Someone makes a remark about your motives for the visit, describing them as an intention to propose your son's marriage with his daughter under the pretext of visiting a hajji returning from Makkah. This is how he misrepresents your motive and purpose. This is what misrepresentation means.

The historic event of Karbala' had certain causes and motives behind it, as well as certain sublime goals. We Muslims

and followers of Hussain ibn 'Ali have misrepresented this event in the same way as Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan distorted the meaning of the Prophet's statement concerning 'Anmar.

That is, Imam Hussain (A.S.) had certain goals and motives for staging his uprising and we have ascribed to him some other motives and goals.

### **The Character of a Sacred Movement**

Abu 'Abd Allah (A.S.) made an uprising that was of unusual greatness and sanctity. The uprising of Abu 'Abd Allah possessed all the characteristics that makes an uprising sacred, so much so that it is without a parallel in the entire history of the world. What are those characteristics?

1. The first condition of a sacred movement is that it should not have a purpose and end that is personal and pertaining to the individual but one which is universal, covering the entire humanity and human species. At times persons make uprisings for personal goals, and sometimes they may launch a movement for the sake of society, or for the sake of mankind, for the sake of truth, or for the sake of justice, equality and monotheism, and not for some personal goal. In such cases the struggle and movement is no longer for a personal cause. One who wages such a struggle represents all human beings. That is why men whose actions and movements were not for the sake of personal motives and for the

sake of humanity or for the sake of truth, justice and equality, and for the sake of *tawhid* and knowledge of God and for the sake of faith, are honored and loved by all people. And that is why the Prophet (S.A.W.) said: ["Hussain is from me and I am from Hussain, (حسين مني انا من حسين)<sup>3</sup> ] We also say, "Hussain is from us and we from Hussain." Why? Because Imam Hussain (A.S.), May Peace be upon him, took a stand 1328 years ago<sup>4</sup> for our sake and for the sake of all mankind. His uprising was sacred and holy and it transcended personal goals.

2.The second condition for an uprising to be sacred is that it should be inspired by a powerful vision and insight. To explain, suppose there is a society who people are unaware, ignorant, and without understanding. There appears among them a man of vision and understanding who understands their ailments and their remedies a hundred time better than they do. At a time when others fail to understand and see, the man of vision sees very clearly and distinctly what other people fail to see at all. He comes forward and takes a stand. Years pass. Twenty, thirty or fifty years later the people wake up and find out why he had risen up and they understand the sacred goals that he had sought to attain whose value and worth was not visible to their fathers and ancestors twenty, forty or fifty years ago.

To give an example, the *marhum* Sayyid Jamal al-Din Asadabadi [Afghani] launched an Islamic movement about sixty

or seventy years ago in the Muslim countries (his death occurred in 1310 H./1892-93, fourteen years before the Constitution Movement in Iran). When you read today the history of this man, you see that he was truly a lone and solitary figure. He knew the maladies of Muslims and their remedy while the people themselves did not. He was insulted and ridiculed by the people and they did not support him. Now after sixty or seventy years when the facts of history have become clearer we see that he understood things at that time which the people of Iran, ninety-nine out of a hundred, did not.

Read at least two of the letters written by this great man. One of them was written to the *marhum* Ayatullah Mirza Shirazi Buzurg, may God elevate his station. The other was an open letter to the 'ulama' of Iran and is like a manifesto. Or read the letters written by him to *marhum* Hajj Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Bujnardi at Mashhad, or to a certain eminent scholar of Isfahan or Shiraz. See how well he understood the problems and how clearly he saw things, how well he knew the character of colonialism and what effective measures he took for awakening this ummah (pay no attention to things that are still said about him by some agents of colonialism, for as the proverb goes, 'this henna has lost its colour!'). His movement was sacred because it was launched by a man who appeared during a difficult era and who saw the reality

behind the appearances, which was invisible to and hardly understood by his contemporaries.

The movement of Imam Hussain (A.S.) is such a movement. Today we understand fully the character of Yazid and the implications of his rule. We know what Mu'awiyah did and what were the schemes of the Umayyads. But the Muslims of that era, ninety-nine out of a hundred, did not understand these things, especially due to the absence of the media of the mass communication media, which exist nowadays. The people of Madinah did not understand the situation that existed. They came to know the character of Yazid and the implications of his caliphate when Hussain ibn 'Ali was killed. They were shocked and they asked themselves why he had been killed. They sent a delegation to Syria consisting of some eminent persons of Madinah and led by a man named 'Abd Allah ibn Hanzalah, known as "Ghasil al-Mala'ikah." Making the journey from Madinah to Syria when they reached Yazid's court, after staying there for some time they came to know the realities of the situation. On returning to Madinah they were asked as to what they had seen. They said, "All that we can tell you is that so long as we were in Damascus we were afraid lest stones should rain on our heads from the heaven." They told them they had seen a caliph who drank wine openly, gambled, and played with hounds



and monkeys and had incestuous relations with women of his family.

Abd Allah ibn Hanzalah had eight sons. He said to his townsmen, "Whether you rise up or not, I will make an uprising even if I have to do it alone with my sons." He fulfilled his words. In the uprising of Harrah against Yazid he sent forth his sons to fight. They were martyred and he himself was martyred after them. 'Abd Allah ibn Hanzalah was not aware of the conditions two or three years earlier when Imam Hussain (A.S.) departed from Madinah. Where was he at the time when Hussain, as he prepared to leave Madinah, was saying:

وَعَلَى الْإِسْلَامِ السَّلَامُ إِذْ قَدْ بَلَّيْتَ الْأُمَّةَ بِرَاعٍ مِثْلِ يَزِيدٍ

*"One should bid farewell to Islam when the ummah is afflicted with such a ruler as Yazid?"*

Hussain ibn 'Ali had to be killed and the Muslim world had to receive a shock so that the likes of 'Abd Allah ibn Hanzalah, the Ghasil al-Mala'ikah, and hundreds of people like him in Madinah, Kufah, and other places may open their eyes and say that Hussain (A.S.) was right in saying what he said.

3.The third characteristic of a sacred movement is its solitary and exclusive character; that is, it is like a flash of lightening in total darkness, a cry in the wilderness of silence, and a movement in the sea of absolute stillness. In conditions of total repression when the people cannot speak out, when there is total

darkness, despair, absence of hope, and absolute silence and stillness, there appears suddenly a man and he breaks the magic silence and stillness. He makes a movement and it is like a flash of light in the midst of surrounding darkness. It is then that others begin to stir and gradually start moving behind him and following him. Wasn't the uprising of Hussain such a movement? Yes, it was.

Such was the movement that Imam Hussain (A.S.) launched. But what were his objectives in launching it? Why were the Infallible Imams so insistent that the tradition of mourning Hussain ibn 'Ali (A.S.) should always remain alive? There is no need for us to look far for the reasons. Hussain ibn 'Ali himself has declared the reasons behind his movement:

وَإِنِّي لَمْ أَخْرَجْ أَشْرًا وَلَا بَطَرًا وَلَا مُفْسِدًا وَلَا ظَالِمًا وَإِنَّمَا خَرَجْتُ لِطَلَبِ الْإِصْلَاحِ فِي أُمَّةٍ جَدِّي  
(ص)

*"Indeed, I have not risen up to do mischief, neither as an adventurer, nor to cause corruption and tyranny. I have risen up solely to seek the reform of the Ummah of my grandfather (S.A.W.)."*

He says in most explicit terms: *"Our society has become corrupt and the ummah of my Grandfather has become degenerate. I have risen up to carry out reform and I am a reformer."*

أُرِيدُ أَنْ أَمُرَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَأَنْهِيَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَأَسِيرَ بِسِيرَةِ جَدِّي وَأَبِي عَلِيٍّ بْنِ أَبِي طَالِبٍ.

*I want to command what is good and stop what is wrong,  
and (in this) I follow the conduct of my grandfather and my  
father, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib.*

أَلَا تَرَوْنَ إِلَى الْحَقِّ لَا يَفْعَلُ بِهِ وَ إِلَى الْبَاطِلِ لَا يَنْتَاهِي عَنْهُ لِيَرْغَبَ الْمُؤْمِنُ فِي لِقَاءِ اللَّهِ فَإِنِّي لَا أَرَى  
الْمَوْتَ إِلَّا سَعَادَةً وَ الْحَيَاةَ مَعَ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا بَرَمًا.

*Don't you see that righteousness is not acted upon and vice  
goes unforbidden. In such a situation, the man of faith yearns for  
the meeting with his Lord ... I see death as nothing but felicity  
and life under oppressors as nothing but disgrace.*

Imam Hussain (A.S.) says, "I have risen up to carry out  
amr bil ma'ruf, to revive the faith, and to struggle against  
corruption. My movement is one which is Islamic and aimed at  
reform."

But what we say is something else. We have made two  
skillful manipulations, which are very amazing (I don't know  
whether I should say skillful or ignorant). In one of these cases,  
we said that Hussain ibn 'Ali rose in order to be killed for the  
sake of the atonement of the sins of the ummah. Now if someone  
were to ask us as to the source of this notion, whether it was  
Imam Hussain (A.S.) himself who said such a thing or if it was  
the Prophet or some Imam, we cannot cite any authority. But still  
we keep on insisting that Imam Hussain (A.S.) got killed so that  
our sins are atoned. I don't know whether we have borrowed this

notion from Christianity. Muslims have unwittingly adopted many ideas from Christendom, which are contrary to Islam.

One of the doctrines of Christianity is the notion of the crucifixion of Christ as a sacrifice made for the sake of the atonement of man's sins. Jesus is called 'the Sacrifice,' and it is an essential part of the Christian doctrine that Jesus went upon the cross for atoning the sins of his people. They have made Jesus carry the burden of their sins! However, we did not suspect that this notion belongs to Christianity and that it is consistent neither with the spirit of Islam nor with the statements of Hussain (A.S.) himself. By God, it is a calumny if we ascribe such a thing to Aba 'Abd Allah (A.S.)! By God, should one attribute such a notion to Hussain ibn 'Ali while he is keeping a fast in the month of Ramadan and claim that Hussain's martyrdom was for the sake of such a purpose and should he ascribe such a statement to him, his fast would be void for ascribing a falsehood to the Imam. Abu 'Abd Allah rose to struggle against sin, whereas we said that he rose in order to be a refuge for sinners!

We claim that Imam Hussain (A.S.) founded an insurance company to guarantee security to sinners! He has insured us against the consequences of sin in return for our tears. All that we have to do is to shed tears for him and in return he guarantees immunity to the sinners. Now one could be whatever one liked to be, one could be an Ibn Ziyad or 'Umar ibn Sa'd, as if one 'Umar

ibn Sa'd, one Sinan ibn Anas, and one Khuli were not enough! Imam Hussain (A.S.) wanted that the likes of Khuli and 'Umar ibn Sa'd should proliferate in the world and so he came and announced: 'O people, be as evil as you can be, for I am your security!'"

There is a second misrepresentation involved in interpreting the event of Karbala'. According to it, Imam Hussain (A.S.) made an uprising and was killed in order to carry out a special command that was solely addressed to him. He was told to go and get martyred. So his action does not relate to us and it is not something, which can be followed and emulated: it does not relate to those precepts of Islam, which are general and universal.

See, what a great difference there is between what the Imam declares and what we say! Imam Hussain (A.S.) cried out that the causes and motives of his uprising are matters that coincide with the general principles of Islam. There was no need for a special order. After all special orders are given in situations where the general prescription is not adequate. Imam Hussain (A.S.) declared in unequivocal terms that Islam is a religion that does not permit any believer (he did not say, an Imam) to remain indifferent in the face of oppression, injustice, perversity and sin. Imam Hussain (A.S.) established a practical ideology, which is the same as the ideology of Islam. Islam had set forth its

principles and Hussain put them into effect. We have divested this event of its ideological character. When it is shorn of its ideological character, it is no more capable of being followed, and when it can not be followed, one cannot make any use of Imam Hussain's (A.S.) teaching and draw any lesson from the event of Karbala'. We have rendered this event barren from the viewpoint of being beneficial and useful. Could there be a worse kind of treachery? This is the reason why I say that the distortion in the meaning of the event of 'Ashura' is a hundred times more dangerous than textual corruption.

Why did the Infallible Imams (and there are even traditions from the Noble Messenger in this regard) want this movement to be kept alive? That it should not be consigned to oblivion? That the people should mourn Imam Hussain (A.S.)? What was the objective that led them to issue this command? We have distorted that objective, declaring that their only goal was that the mourning ceremonies are to be held for the sake of offering consolation to Hadhrat Zahra', (S.A.). Although she is with her great son in Paradise, we imagine that she is continually restless and full of sorrow, so she should be given consolation by the mourning of such worthless people as us! Can there be a greater insult of Hadhrat Zahra' than this notion?

Some others say that Imam Hussain (A.S.) was murdered without any guilt at Karbala' at the hands of a group of aggressors

and this was a tragedy. It is true that Imam Hussain (A.S.) was killed without any guilt. But is this all there is to the event that an innocent person was murdered by a group of aggressors! Every day a thousand innocent persons are killed and wiped out throughout the world by criminals, and this is of course a tragic fact. But does this kind of death have such a value that one should go on expressing sorrow over it and continue to mourn it year after year, for years, or rather for centuries, for ten and twenty centuries, expressing sorrow and regretting that Hussain ibn 'Ali was killed without guilt and that his innocent blood was shed for no reason by aggressors? But who can dare say that Hussain ibn 'Ali's death was in vain and his blood was shed futilely? If one can find anyone in the whole world who did not allow one drop of his blood to be wasted, that is Hussain ibn 'Ali. If you can find anyone in the whole world who did not let one particle of his personality to go waste it is Hussain ibn 'Ali. He set such a high value for every single drop of his blood that it is indescribable! If you take into account the amount of wealth that has been and is spent for his sake and will continue to be spent until the day of Judgment, you will see that humanity has spent billions and trillions for every drop of his blood. Can anyone say that a man wasted his life whose death, forever and ever, sends out tremors through the castles of the oppressors? That his blood went in vain? Is his martyrdom to be saddening for us because

Hussain ibn 'Ali was killed in vain? It is we, wretched and ignorant people that we are, you, and I whose lives are wasting. We should grieve for ourselves! You insult Hussain ibn Ali when you say that his life was lost in vain! Hussain ibn 'Ali is someone about whom it is said.

إِنَّ لَكَ دَرَجَةً عِنْدَ اللَّهِ، لَنْ تَنَالَهَا إِلَّا بِالشَّهَادَةِ.

Indeed you have a station with God which cannot be attained except through martyrdom.

Did Hussain ibn 'Ali desire to die a vain death when he aspired for martyrdom?

The Imams have exhorted us to keep alive the tradition of mourning over Hussain ibn Ali because his goal was a sacred goal. Hussain ibn 'Ali established a school, and they wanted his school to remain alive and flourish.

You will not find a practical school of thought in the whole world that may be likened to that of Hussain ibn 'Ali (A.S.). If you can find a single another example of Hussain ibn 'Ali, you may ask why we should revive his memory every year. If you can find another example of that which was manifested in Hussain ibn 'Ali during the event of 'Ashura', in those ordeals and taxing conditions, of the meaning of twahid, of faith, of the knowledge of God, of perfection, convincing faith in the other world, of resignation and submission, of fortitude and manliness, of self contentment, of steadiness and steadfastness, of honor and



dignity, of the love and quest for freedom, of concern for mankind, of the passion to serve humanity. So if you can find a single example in the whole world, then you may question the need to refresh his memory every year. But he is unique and without a parallel.

Keeping alive the memory of his name and his movement is for the purpose that our spirits may be illumined by the light of the spirit of Hussain ibn 'Ali (A.S.).

If a tear that we shed for him should signify a harmony between our souls and his spirit, it represents a brief flight that our spirit makes along with Hussain's spirit. Should it create within us a little glow of his valor, a particle of his free nature, a particle of his faith, a particle of his piety, and a small spark of his tawhid, such a tear has an infinite value. They have said that it has the worth an entire world even if it is so small as the 'wing of a gnat.' Believe it! But that is nor a tear shed for a pointless death, but a tear for the greatness of Hussain and his great spirit, a tear that signifies harmony with Hussain ibn 'Ali and of movement in his steps. Yes, such a tear has an incalculable worth even if it is so small as a gnat's wing.

They wanted this practical ideology to remain forever before the people's view, to witness that the Prophet's family are a proof and testimony of the truthfulness of the Prophet himself. If it is said that a certain Muslim warrior displayed great faith and

valor in such and such a battle against Iran or Byzantine, for instance, it is not so much of an evidence of the Prophet's truthfulness as when it is said that the Prophet's son did such and such an act. A leader's family is always subject to more suspicion and doubt than any of his followers. But when we observe the family of the Prophet at the highest summit of faith and sincerity that is the best evidence of the Prophet's truthfulness. No one was so close to the Prophet (S.A.W.) like 'Ali (A.S.). He grew up by the Prophet's side. No one had a faith in the Prophet like him or was more dedicated to the Prophet. This is the first evidence of the Prophet's truthfulness. Hussain is the Prophet's [grand] son. When he manifests his faith in the Prophet's teaching it is a manifestation of the Prophet himself. Things, which are always declared by human beings verbally but are rarely observed in practice, are clearly visible in Hussain's being. What makes a human being so undefeatable? Subhan Allah! See the heights to which a human being can rise! See how undefeatable is the spirit of the human being whose body bears wounds from head to foot, his young sons have been cut to pieces before his very eyes, he is suffering from extreme thirst and when he looks up at the sky it appears dark in his eyes, he sees that the members of his family will be taken captive, he has lost all that he had and all that has remained for him is his own undefeatable spirit.

Show me such a spectacle of human greatness in an event other than Karbala' and I will celebrate its memory instead of Karbala! Accordingly, we should keep alive the memory of such an event, of a group of seventy-two persons who defeated the spirit of a host of thirty thousand. How did they inflict such a defeat? Firstly, though a minority facing certain death, not a single one of them joined the enemy's side. Yet some men from the thirty thousand joined their ranks, including one of their commanders, Hurr ibn Yazid Riyahi and another thirty. This indicates the moral victory of this group and the defeat of the other one. 'Umar ibn Sa'd took certain measures in Karbala' which disclose his moral defeat. In Karbala' 'Umar ibn Sa'd's men refrained from a man-to-man encounter during the battle. At first they complied in accordance with the custom prevalent in those days, before launching an all-out attack and shooting arrows. The man-to-man fight was a kind of contest in which one man from one side fought a man from the other. After several men were killed in these encounters with the companions of Imam Hussain (A.S.), strengthening their morale, 'Umar ibn Sa'd ordered his men to refrain from man-to-man fights.

When did Abu 'Abd Allah come to the field for the final battle? Imagine, it is afternoon on the day of 'Ashura'. Until this time there were still several of his companions who offered the prayers with him. He has been very busy from the morning until

the afternoon of that day as it was he, most of the time, who has brought the bodies of his companions from the battlefield and placed them in the tent of the martyrs. He himself has rushed to the side of his companions in their last moments and it is he himself who consoles and reassures his family members. Apart from all this, there is his personal grief for the dear ones that he has lost. He is the last of all to come into the field of battle. They imagine that it would be a simple task to deal with Hussain in such a circumstance. But he does not give a moment's reprieve to any contestant that dares to come forward to combat him. 'Umar ibn Sa'd then cries out: "Woe to you! Do you know whom you are fighting? This is the son of the most fatal of Arab warriors (هَذَا ابْنُ قَتَالِ الْغُرَبِ) He is the son of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. By God, his father's soul is in his body. (وَاللَّهِ نَفْسُ أَبِيهِ بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ) Don't fight him singly!"

Wasn't this an indication of defeat? Thirty thousand men combat against a single man, lonely and solitary, who has suffered all those sorrows and ordeals, and who has been through the arduous and grueling labors of the day, thirsty and hungry, and he defeats them and makes them flee.

They faced a defeat not only against the sword of Abu 'Abd Allah but also his logic and eloquence. Abu 'Abd Allah delivered two or three sermons on the day of 'Ashura' before the commencement of his battle. These sermons are truly amazing.

Those who practice the act of oration know that it is not possible for someone in an ordinary state to say things, which are sublime, or at the height of sublimity. One's spirit must be in a state of fervour, especially if the oration is of an elegiac character. It is only with a heart burning with feeling that one can deliver a good elegy. If one wants to compose a *ghazal*, he must be strongly moved with the passion of love so as to say a good *ghazal*. If one wishes to compose epic poetry, he must be moved with warlike emotions.

When Abu 'Abd Allah began his address, especially the sermon that he made on the day of 'Ashura', which is one of the most elaborate of his sermons, 'Umar ibn Sa'd was alarmed by the effect it might have on his men's morale. The Imam alighted from his horse and mounted a camel in order to make the sermon, as he wanted to make his voice heard better from a higher point he called out to them.<sup>5</sup>

نَبَاَلَكُمْ أَيُّهَا الْجَمَاعَةُ وَتَرَحَّأُ حِينَ اسْتَصْرَحْتُمُونَا وَالْهَيْنَ، فَأَصْرَحْنَاكُمْ مُوجِفِينَ.

Words, which are truly reminiscent of the sermons of 'Ali (A.S.). Aside from the sermons of 'Ali we won't find a more powerful and vibrant sermon in the whole world. He spoke three times. 'Umar ibn Sa'd was frightened lest Hussain's sermon should change the minds of his troops. The second time when Abu 'Abd Allah started to address them, due to the defeatist morale of the enemy, Umar ibn Sad ordered his men to hoot and

beat their mouth with their hands so that no one could hear Hussain. Is that not an evidence of their defeat and the sign of Husyan's victory?

If a man has faith in God, in *tawhid*, if he has a link with God and faith in the other world, single-handedly he can inflict a moral defeat on a host of twenty and thirty thousand. Is this not a lesson for us? Where can you find another example of it? Who else can you find in the whole world who could utter two sentences of that sermon in conditions in which Hussain ibn 'All spoke, or for that matter two sentences like the sermon of Zaynab (A.S.) at the city gates of Kufah? If our Imams have told us to revive this mourning every year and to keep it alive for ever it is for the purpose that we may understand these points, that we may realize the greatness of Hussain, so that if we shed tears for him it is out of understanding.

Our knowledge of Hussain elevates us. It makes us human beings, free men, followers of truth and justice, and real Muslims. The school of Hussain is a man-making school, not a school that produces sinners. Hussain is the bastion of righteous conduct, not a citadel for sin and sinfulness.

The historians report that at daybreak on the day of 'Ashura', after offering the prayer with his companions, he turned to them and said, "*Companions, get prepared. Death is nothing but a bridge that takes you across this world into another, from a*

*world that is very coarse, hard and base to one that is sublime, noble and gentle.*" These were his words. But now observe his conduct. The reports do not come from Hussain ibn 'Ali but from those who have chronicled the events. The episode has been reported even by Hilal ibn Nafi', who was accompanying 'Umar ibn Sa'd as his chronicler. He says, Hussain ibn 'Ali was astonishing to me. As the time of his martyrdom drew nearer and his ordeals became severer, his countenance appeared to be more refreshed and ruddier, like someone about to meet his beloved."

Even in the last moments when that accursed wretch approached him to sever his sacred head, he says,

(لَقَدْ شَغَلَنِي نُورُ وَجْهِهِ وَجَمَالُ هَيْبَتِهِ عَنِ الْفِكْرَةِ فِي قَتْلِهِ.)

"When I approached Hussain ibn 'Ali and my eyes fell on him, the light and burnish of his face so gripped me that I forgot my intention to kill him:

The light of his face and its awe-inspiring beauty so gripped me that I was distracted from the thought of killing him.

(لَقَدْ شَغَلَنِي نُورُ وَجْهِهِ وَجَمَالُ هَيْبَتِهِ عَنِ الْفِكْرَةِ فِي قَتْلِهِ.)

They write that Abu Abd Allah had chosen a point for his combat which was nearer the tents of the womenfolk. That was for two reasons. Firstly, he knew the unmanly and inhuman character of the enemies. They lacked even the sense of honor to spare the tents of their attacks, as it was he whom they were fighting. Therefore he wanted to restrain them from attacking his

camp so long as he was alive and had the strength to stop them. He would make a frontal attack and they would flee. But he would not pursue them but return to guard the tents of his womenfolk from any assault. Secondly, so long as he was alive he wanted the members of his family to know that he was alive. Accordingly, he had chosen a point from where his voice could be heard by them. Whenever he returned after making an attack he would stand at that point and cry out:

لَا حَوْلَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ الْعَلِيِّ الْعَظِيمِ.

*There is no power or strength save that which derives from  
God, the Exalted and the Almighty.*

His cries would reassure the women who knew that the Imam was still alive. The Imam had told them not to come out of the tents as long as he was alive (Don't believe those who say that the women kept running out every now and then. Never. The Imam had ordered them to remain in the tents as long as he was alive). He had told them that they must not make any untoward utterance, which might reduce their reward with God. He had told them that they would find deliverance and that their ultimate end would be a good one, that God will punish their enemies. They did not have the Imam's permission to come out of their tents, and they did not. Hussain ibn Ali's sense of manly honor and their own sense of feminine honor did not permit them to come out. Accordingly, when they heard the Imam utter '*La hawl wala*



*quwatta illa billahil aliyyil azim'*, (لا حول ولا قوة الا بالله العلي العظيم), they felt reassured. And as the Imam had come back to them once or twice after bidding them farewell, they still expected the Imam to return.

In those days they used to train Arabic horses for the battlefield, as the horse is an animal that can be trained. Such a horse would show a particular reaction when its master was killed. The members of Abu 'Abd Allah's household were in the tents awaiting the Imam, that he might return to them once again and they might see his angelic visage one again. Suddenly they heard the sound of the neighing of the Imam's horse. They rushed to the tent's door imagining that the Imam had come. But they saw the horse without its rider with its saddle overturned. It was then that the children and the women raised the cries of *Wa Hussainah!* and *Wa Muhammada!* They surrounded the horse and each of them began to mourn for him. Mourning is part of human nature. When a person wants to express his grief he mournfully addresses the heaven, or an animal, or some person. The Imam had told them that they must not weep or lament so long as he was alive. But of course they could mourn him when he died. And so in that state they began their lamentations.

They write that Hussain ibn 'Ali had a daughter named Sukaynah, whom he loved greatly. Later she grew up to become a learned lady of letters much revered and respected by all scholars

and literary men. This child was very dear to Abu 'Abd Allah (A.S.) and she too had an unusual love for her father. They write that this child uttered some sentences in the way of mourning which are very heartrending. In a mournful tone she addressed the horse and said:

يا جواد أبي هل سقى أبي أم قتل عطشاناً؟

*O my father's stallion, my father was thirsty when he went out. Did they give him water or was he killed thirsty?'*

That was at the time when Abu 'Abd Allah lay fallen on the ground.

وَصَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ الطَّاهِرِينَ وَلَا حَوْلَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ الْعَلِيِّ الْعَظِيمِ.

## Notes:

1. al Halabi, *Sirah* v2, p. 77.
2. *Musnad*, Ahmad ibn. Hanbal, v2, p. 199.
3. Al-shaykh al Mufid, *al Irshad*, p. 249, *Alam al Wara*, p. 216, Ibn Shahr Ashub, *al Manaqib*, v4, p. 71, *Hilyat al abrar*, v1, p. 560, *Kashf al Ghummah*, v2 pp. 10,61, *Mulhaqt Ihqaq al haqq*, v11, pp. 256-279.
4. This sermon was delivered in the year 1389 H. corresponding to Farvardin 1348 (March-April 1969).
5. al Masudi, *Muruj al Dhahab*, v3, p. 69.

## Fourth Sermon

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ بَارِيءِ الْخَالِقِ أَجْمَعِينَ وَالصَّلَاةُ وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَى عَبْدِ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَخَلِيلِهِ وَصَفِيِّهِ، سَيِّدِنَا  
وَنَبِيِّنَا وَمَوْلَانَا أَبِي الْقَاسِمِ مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَعَلَى آلِهِ الطَّيِّبِينَ الطَّاهِرِينَ الْمُتَقُومِينَ.  
أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ:

فَبِمَا نَقْضِهِمْ مِيثَاقَهُمْ لَعَنَّاهُمْ وَجَعَلْنَا قُلُوبَهُمْ قَاسِيَةً يُحَرِّفُونَ الْكَلِمَ عَنْ مَوَاضِعِهِ وَنَسُوا حَظًّا مِمَّا ذُكِّرُوا بِهِ.

*In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful*

*All Praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of the worlds and the Maker of all creation, and may Peace and benedictions be upon His servant and messenger, His beloved and elect, our master, our prophet, and our sire, Abul Qasim Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his pure, immaculate, and infallible Progeny.*

*I seek the refuge of Allah from the accursed Satan*

*So for their breaking their compact We cursed them and made their hearts hard; they would pervert the words from their meanings. and they forgot a portion of what they were reminded of. (5:13)*

**O**

ur discussion concerning the distortions (*tahrifat*)

in popular accounts of the historical event of

Ashura consists of four parts:

1. The meaning of distortion (*tahrif*) in general.
2. A description of the distortions that have taken place in regard to the historic event of Ashura and their examples.
3. The factors responsible for these distortions and the causes that lead to *tahrif* in general and the special factors that have been particularly at play in relation to this historic event.

4. Our responsibility' in regard to these distortions, that is, the duty of the '*ulama*' as well as that of the common people.

Of these four, we have already discussed the first three parts in the previous sessions, and tonight, with God's grace, we will discuss the fourth topic.

To be certain, during the course of time gradually there have taken place distortions in this very great historic event, and there is no doubt that here we have a responsibility: to combat these distortions. To state it more clearly, and to put it in somewhat self-important terms, it may be said that our generation has a mission to fight against these distortions and in misrepresentations of 'Ashura. But before we may discuss the responsibility of the scholars of the ummah (in other words, the *khawass*) and the responsibility of the people (that is, the '*awamm*'), I would like to mention two points in the way of introduction.

The first point is that we should examine the past to see who has been responsible for these distortions, whether it were the scholars who were responsible for it or the common people. Next, what is our responsibility to today and who is to shoulder it?

Who has been responsible for it in the past? Usually in such cases the '*ulama*' blame the people and the people put the blame on the '*ulama*'. The '*ulama*' say that the guilt lies with the people and their ignorance. They are so ignorant, ill informed and un-

worthy that they only deserve to be fed with such nonsense. They do not deserve to know the truth and the facts.

I heard it from the *marhum* Ayatullah Sadr, may God elevate his station, that Taj Nayshaburi would say absurd things from the *minbar*. Someone objected to him, saying, "What are these things that you say? You receive such big audiences, why don't you say some sensible things?" He replied that the people did not deserve it. Then he produced, so to speak, a 'proof' to substantiate his assertion.

The common people, the masses, also have an argument against the '*ulama* and the clerics which they often use. They say, "When a fish begins to rot, the rotting begins at the head. The scholars are like the head of the fish and we its tail." However, the fact is that in this case the responsibility and the guilt lies both upon the '*ulama* as well as the laity.

One should know that the common people too share a responsibility in such cases. In cases such as this, it is the people who let the truth to be obliterated and spread superstitious nonsense.

There is a well-known tradition, which is considered reliable by scholars. A man asked Imam Sadiq (A.S.) concerning the Qur'anic verse:

وَمِنْهُمْ أُمِّيُونَ لَا يَخْلُمُونَ السُّبْتَ إِلَّا آمَانِي وَ إِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَظُنُونَ

***And among them are the illiterate folks who know not the Book but only vain hopes and nothing but conjectures. (2:78)***

Here God is critical of the common people from among the Jews. Although He refers to them as having been uneducated, unlettered and illiterate, nevertheless He considers them blameworthy. The questioner, while admitting that the '*ulama*' of the Jews' were indeed responsible, asks the Imam as to why the common people among them were held guilty. Was it not a valid excuse that they were illiterate commoners? The tradition is an elaborate one. The Imam replies that such is not the case. He answers that there are certain matters that do require learning and which can only be understood by the learned and which illiterate people do not comprehend. Concerning such issues one may say that the common people are not responsible, as they have not acquired learning in religious subjects. True, at times they may be held responsible for not having acquired education, and this could be an argument against them. However, if there are cases where they have no responsibility that is in issues, which require the study of books and proper instruction under teachers. One who has never had any teacher and has never gone to school is not held responsible in such matters. However, there are issues, which a normal human being can understand with his natural faculty of a sound mind. Here it is not necessary for one to have gone to the school, to have read books and have had teachers. In

other words, it does [not] require one to have a diploma or a degree or even to have received middle-school education. All that is needed is sanity and a sound mind. Thereafter, the Imam gives an example. Suppose there is an *alim* who preaches to the people to be pious and Godfearing while he himself acts in a manner contrary to piety and Godfearing. He does not practice what he preaches and the people observe this contradiction between his word and deed. The Imam points out that it is not necessary for one to be educated and learned in order to see that such men are not worthy of being followed. The common people among the Jews would observe these things with their own eyes and understand them with their minds (*wadtarru bi ma'arifi qulubihim*).<sup>1</sup> With their natural intelligence they could perceive that one must not follow such persons, but in spite of that they would follow them. Therefore they were responsible and guilty.

There are some matters that do not require any education or training or any linguistic expertise in any particular language such as Arabic or Farsi or any training in any of such subjects as grammar, law, jurisprudence, logic or philosophy. All that is needed is the natural gift of intelligence and they (the common people among the Jews) did possess this. They perceived these things with their natural intelligence. The Noble Prophet (S.A.W.) has a saying, which is one of the profoundest because of its innate self-evident character. He said:

*The value of works depends solely on intentions, and everyone's recompense depends on his intentions.*<sup>2</sup>

It means that the significance and worth of one's actions depends on one's intentions. If you do something unintentionally you are not guilty if it is something bad and if it is something good you do not deserve any reward.

Now if someone were to come and relate a dream and a story about someone who is forgiven his sins and admitted to the highest stations of paradise due to something that happened to him in a condition of unconsciousness in which his will and intention had played no role whatsoever, or rather his real intentions were quite the opposite, should we accept such a thing? Does it require book learning? Does it need literacy or the knowledge of Arabic? Only repentance and a return to God can free one from his sins:

... اِنَّ الْحَسَنَاتِ يُذْهِبْنَ السَّيِّئَاتِ ...

**...Verily good deeds obliterate evil deeds.... (11:114)**

It is good deeds that wipe out the traces left by evil deeds. But involuntary actions are not such. However, 'we fail to use our God-given intelligence to make correct judgements'.

In some books they have written that once upon a time there was a robber who used to waylay travellers, rob them and kill them. One day he came to know that a caravan of pilgrims bound for the holy shrine in Karbala was on its way. He came and hid



himself in a mountain pass lying there in wait to waylay the pilgrims bound for the shrine of Imam Hussain (A.S.), to rob them of their belongings and to kill them if necessary. While he waited for the caravan to reach, suddenly he fell asleep. The caravan came and passed by while he remained asleep. In that state he saw a dream. It was the scene of the day of resurrection and he was being taken towards hell. Why? Because he had not performed a single good deed in his life. All he had done was wickedness and crime. He was taken to the verge of hell but hell refused to accept him. Why? Because as this man slept by the wayside as the pilgrim caravan passed, the dust raised by the feet of the pilgrims of Imam Hussain's (A.S.) shrine had settled on his body and clothes. As a result of this involuntary act all his sins were forgiven without him having any conscious intention, or rather despite his intention to kill the pilgrims, and contrary to the declaration of the Prophet that *"the value of actions depends solely on intentions, and everyone's recompense depends on his intentions."* [There is even a couplet that has been composed on the theme.]

*Indeed, hell shall not touch a body, whereupon lies the dust of the feet of Hussain's pilgrims!*

It is a nice line poetically, but is unfortunately untrue from the viewpoint of the teaching of Imam Hussain (A.S.).

The second point, which I must mention before describing this responsibility and duty relates to the dangers that lie in these distortions. Let us briefly discuss the dangers that lie in distortion of facts. We have already discussed the various kinds of distortion that have occurred in relation to the historic event of 'Ashura and the factors responsible for such distortions. It is possible that some people might think, After all what is wrong with *tahrif*?' What harm can it do and how can it create any danger?' The answer is that the danger of *tahrif* is extraordinarily great. *Tahrif* is an indirect blow, which is more effective than a direct one. If a book is corrupted (whether in respect of its wording, or its meaning and content) and it is a book of guidance, it is transformed into a book that is misleading. If it is a book of human felicity it is transformed into a book of human wretchedness. If it is a book that edifies and elevates human beings, as a result of corruption it is changed into one that brings man's fall and degeneration. Basically it alters the very form of reality and not only makes it ineffective it has a reverse effect.

Everything is prone to certain hazards, which are related to its nature. The Noble Prophet (S.A.W.) said:

*There are three hazards for religion: the scholar of evil conduct, the tyrannical leader (ruler), and the person who is diligent in practising religion but is ignorant.*<sup>3</sup>

That is, there are three dangers for religion: 1. Scholars who are evil and vicious in their conduct; 2. Leaders who are tyrannical and unjust; 3. Devout persons who are ignorant. The Prophet has considered them hazards for the faith. In the same way that plants and animals are affected by certain pests and diseases, and in the same way as the human body is prone to certain diseases and disorders, religion, creed and faith are also prone to certain dangers. Distortions of the faith, which are brought about by two out of the three categories of people mentioned by the Noble Prophet, that is, scholars of evil conduct and ignorant and sanctimonious persons, are a hazard for the faith and are destructive for religion. Corruption and distortion alter the content of a message of deliverance and the people who accept it as the truth derive an opposite result.

Ali (A.S.), a figure with all that greatness, has a strangely distorted personality in the outlook of some people. Some people know Ali (A.S.) only as an athlete. At times some people of very suspect motives publish pictures of Ali that show him bearing in hand a two-tongued sword, like a pythons tongue, and with facial features and expression one does not know from where they have got them. It is definite that a picture or statue of Ali or that of the Prophet never existed. They have painted such a strange face that one can hardly believe that it is the same Ali famous for his justice, the Ali who wept at nights for the fear of God. The face

of a devout man, of someone who is used to nightly worship, of someone who engages in *istighfar* at nights, the face of a sage, a judge, a man of letters is a different face.

There is another thing, which is quite popular especially amongst us Iranians. We refer to the Fourth Imam (A.S.) as "Imam Zayn al-'Abidin-e *Bimar*"\* (i.e. the sick one). In no language do we ever come across the epithet *bimar* along with the name of Imam Zayn al-'Abidin. Such an epithet does not exist in Arabic. He has a number of appellations, one of which is *al-Sajjad* (i.e. one who prostrates a lot), another is *Dhu al-Thafanat* (i.e. one who has callouses on his forehead, due to prostrations). Do you find any book in Arabic that may contain an epithet synonymous with the word *bimar* for the Imam? Imam Zayn al-'Abidin (a) was only ill during the days of the episode of 'Ashura (perhaps it was an act of providence meant to save the Imam's life and to preserve the progeny of Imam (A.S.) and this very illness saved his life. Several times they wanted to kill the Imam, but as he was seriously ill, they would leave him saying, *Innahu li-ma bih*<sup>4</sup> i.e., why should we kill him. He is himself dying. Who in the world has not fallen ill at some time or another during his life? Apart from this instance of his illness, see if you can find any other reference stating that Imam Zayn al-'Abidin was sick. But

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\* After the Islamic Revolution in Iran this saying in regards to Imam Zayn al-'Abidin has become almost non-existent. [Z.H-M]

we have pictured Imam Zayn al-'Abidin as someone chronically ill, pale faced, suffering from fever and as someone bent with weakness and always carrying a walking stick and someone who moans as he walks!

The same distortion and lie about the Imam's figure has led some people to continually groan and moan and make themselves appear as chronically sick so that people may revere them for that and say, "Look at him, he is just like Imam Zayn al-'Abidin the *Bimar*!" This is distortion. Imam Zayn al-'Abidin was not different from Imam Hussain (A.S.) or Imam Baqir (A.S.) in respect of physical health and constitution. The Imam lived for forty years after the event of Karbala' and he was quite healthy like others and was not different from Imam Sadiq (A.S.), for instance, in this regard. Why should we then call him "Imam Zayn al-'Abidin the *Bimar*"<sup>5</sup>

Imamate means being a model and an exemplar. The philosophy of the Imam's existence is that he is a human being of a superhuman calibre, like the prophets, who introduced themselves in these words so that the people may follow them as higher models of humanity:

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ أَنَّمَا إِلَهُكُمُ اللَّهُ وَاحِدٌ ...

**SAY: "I am only a human being like yourselves, (and) it has been revealed to me that your God is One God.... (18:110)**

However, when the countenance of these figures is distorted to a great degree they are no more capable of serving as models. That is, instead of being beneficial, following and emulating such imaginary figures gives an opposite result. Thus we have seen briefly the great danger that lies in *tahrif*. Actually *tahrif* is an indirect blow and a stab in the back.

The Jews are the world champions of *tahrif*. No people in world history have carried out *tahrif* to the extent that they have done. For the same reason no one has ever delivered a great blow to humanity by distorting facts and fabricating falsehoods.

### **Our Responsibility and Mission**

You should know that we have a serious responsibility in this regard, especially in the present times. One cannot serve the people with a distorted version of the truth, neither was it possible in the past. It was unproductive also in the past, but its harm was lesser. Its harm is much greater in this era. Our greatest responsibility is to see what distortions have occurred in our history; to see what distortions have occurred in the presentation of our eminent figures and personalities, and what misinterpretations have occurred in the Qur'an. There has been no textual corruption in the Qur'an. It means that not a single word has been added to it nor a word has been deleted from it. However, the danger of distortion of the meanings of the Qur'an

is as serious as any textual corruption. What is meant by distortion of meanings of the Qur'an? It means interpreting the Qur'an in a wrong and misleading manner. Such a thing should not be permitted to take place. We should see what kind of distortions have taken place in our history in historical episodes such as the historic event of 'Ashura, which must always remain a source of lesson and education for us, being a document of moral and social training and education. We should combat such distortions.

### **The Duty of the '*Ulama* and the People**

What is the duty of the '*ulama*' of the Ummah in this regard and the duty of the common people, the masses?

I want to make a general remark concerning the responsibility of the '*ulama*'. The deviation of an '*alim*' lies in always confronting passively the weak points and shortcomings of the people. Spiritual, moral and social weak points are a kind of sickness. In bodily illness the sick person is usually conscious of his illness and he himself seeks his own treatment. But in spiritual illnesses that which makes things difficult is that the sick person does not know that he is sick. On the contrary he considers his illness a sign of health. He even has a liking for his illness. It is not the case that individuals are conscious of their weak points and accept them as such; rather they consider them

as their strong points! It is the '*alim* who understands the weak points of his community

When an '*alim* is faced with a weak point of the community he has two alternatives before him:

1.He may struggle against these weak points, and such a person is called a reformer (*muslih*). A reformer is one who fights against the weak points of the people. The people usually do not like him.

2.He may consider it a difficult and formidable task to combat the weak points of the people. He may conclude that there is not only no reward to be obtained in fighting the people's weak points, but there are also disadvantages. Accordingly, he exploits their weakness. It is here that he becomes an instance of 'the vicious scholar' (*faqih fajir*) who according to the Noble Prophet (S.A.W.) is one of the three hazards and pestilences of the faith.

I will not discuss other problems here but will confine myself to the issue of the event of 'Ashura. The common people have two weak points in relation to the mourning ceremonies held for Imam (A.S.). One of them is that - to the extent I have come across in my own experience (and I have not yet encountered any exception) - usually those who arrange and organize the mourning gatherings (*majalis*), whether they are held in mosques or at homes, want the *majalis* to draw good



attendance. They are satisfied if there is a substantial crowd and are unhappy if the attendance is sparse. This is a weak point. These sessions are not held to draw crowds. Our purpose is not to hold a parade or a march. The purpose is to become acquainted with the truths and to fight against distortions. This is a weak point, which the speaker has to reckon with. Should he fight this weak point or should he exploit it like Taj Nayshaburi? Should he wish to combat this weak point it would not be compatible with the objectives of the organizers and holders of the *majlis* as well as with the wishes of the audience who like to get together and love tumult and fanfare. Should he want to exploit this weak point then all that may bother him is how to draw larger crowds. It is here that an '*alim* stands at a crossroad: now that these people are fools and have such a weak point, should I exploit it, or should I struggle against it and go after the truth?

Another weak point present in the mourning gatherings - which is mostly from the people's side and has fortunately become lesser, is that profuse and loud weeping is regarded as the criterion of their success. After all the speaker on the *minbar* must relate the sorrowful accounts of the tragic events. While these accounts are related, the people are expected not merely to shed tears: the mere shedding of tears is not acceptable; the *majlis* must be rocked with cries of mourning. I do not say that the *majlis* should not be rocked with mourning; what I say is that this

must not be the objective. If tears are shed as a result of listening to facts and the *majlis* is rocked with mourning by descriptions of real history without false and fabricated narratives, without distortion, without conjuring companions for Imam Hussain (A.S.) that did not exist in history and who are unknown to Imam Hussain (A.S.) himself (as they were nonexistent), without attributing such children to Imam Hussain (A.S.) as did not exist, without carving out enemies for Imam Hussain (A.S.) that basically had not existed - that is very good indeed. But when reality and truth are absent, should we go on making war against Imam (A.S.) by fabricating falsehoods and lies?

This is a weak point of the common people. What is to be done? Should it be exploited? Should we exploit it for our interests and take them for a ride? Should we, like Taj Nayshaburi, say that as the people are stupid, we should make use of their stupidity? No! Our greatest responsibility and the 'ulama's biggest duty is to struggle against the weak points of society. That is why that the Noble Prophet (S.A.W.) said: -

*When heresies and fabrications appear in my Ummah, the 'alim must declare what he knows, otherwise he will be cursed by God.*<sup>6</sup>

That is: when falsehoods and fabrications appear and when things become popular which are not part of the religion, things which the Prophet (S.A.W.) has not prescribed, it is the duty of

the learned to declare the truth even if the people do not like it. And may the curse of God be upon him who hides the facts. The Noble Qur'an itself has declared in stronger terms:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَكْتُمُونَ مَا آتَانَا مِنَ الْبَيِّنَاتِ وَالْهُدَىٰ مِنْ بَيْنِنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِي الْكِتَابِ أُولَٰئِكَ يَلْعَنُهُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَلْعَنُهُمُ اللَّاعِنُونَ

*Those who conceal what We have revealed of the clear signs and guidance, after We have made them clear for the people in the Book, God shall curse them and they will be cursed by all the cursers. (2:159)*

It means, the learned that conceal the truths declared by us, who know the facts but conceal them and refrain from expressing them, may the curse of God be upon them and the curse of everyone who curses. The duty of the 'ulama during the era of the last prophesy is to struggle against *tahrif*. Fortunately the means for such a task are also available and there are, and have been, persons among the 'ulama who combat such weak points. The book *Lu' lu' wa marjan* was written on this very topic of the event of 'Ashura and I have mentioned it earlier. It is by the *marhum* Hajji Nuri (may God be pleased with him) and its purpose is precisely to carry out a campaign in this regard, a most sacred duty which has been fulfilled by that great man, whose work is an instance of the first part of the above-mentioned *hadith*:

When heresies and fabrications appear in my Ummah, the 'alim must declare what he knows...

It is the duty of the *'ulama* to state in clear terms the facts relating to this case to the people even if they do not like it. It is the duty of the *'ulama* to combat falsehoods. It is the duty of the *'ulama* to expose the liars. The jurists (*fuqaha*) have made certain remarks concerning the issue of back-biting (*ghibah*). They say that there are certain exceptions where back-biting is permissible. Among cases relating to these exceptions is one where the entire major *'uama* have committed this kind of *ghibah*, considering it necessary and even obligatory. This is the case of *jarh*, where the standing of a narrator (*rawi*) is critically examined. Suppose a person narrates a tradition from the Prophet (S.A.W.) or from one of the Imams (A.S.). Is one to accept his statements immediately? No. One must investigate his background to see what kind of man he was, whether a truthful person or a liar. If you discover a weak point in the life of this person, a shortcoming, a defect, an instance of lying or misconduct, it is not only lawful for you but even obligatory (*wajib*) to discredit this person in your books. This is called *jarh*. Although it is *ghibah* and it amounts to casting disrepute on someone - which is in general not a lawful thing to do whether the subject is dead or alive - but in this case where the matter is that of distortion of the truth and its *tahrif*, one must discredit him and the liar must be exposed and discredited.

Someone may be a great scholar in a certain field, such as Mulla Hussain Kashifi, who was a very learned religious scholar. But his *Rawdat al-Shuhada* is replete with lies. No one has been spared of his lies. Even Ibn Ziyad and 'Umar ibn Sa'd are victims of his lies. He has written that Ibn Ziyad gave fifty camel-loads (*kharwar*) of gold to 'Umar ibn Sa'd so as to make him go to Karbala' to do what he did. (Anyone who hears such a story might think that if such is the case one cannot put much blame on 'Umar ibn Sa'd. There are many who would do such a thing if given fifty camel-loads of gold.)

There is a general agreement about Mulla Darbandi that he was a good man. Even *marhum* Hajji Nuri, who criticizes his book, and with justification, says that he was a good man. This man was sincerely devoted to Imam (A.S.) and it is said that whenever he heard Imam Hussain's (A.S.) name mentioned tears would come into eyes. He was also quite well versed in *fiqh* and *usul al-fiqh*. He imagined himself to be a jurist (*faqih*) of the first rank. However; that was not the case. He was a jurist of second or at least third rank. He wrote a book named *Khaza'in* (lit. 'Treasures') which is a complete course in *fiqh* and has been published. He was a contemporary of the author of the *Jawahir* (lit. 'Jewels'). He asked the author of the *Jawahir* as to what title he had given to his book. He said, '*Jawahir*.' As the title of his own book was *Khaza'in*, he said, "There are many of such

*jawahir* in our *khaza'in*." However, the *Jawahir* has been reprinted ten times and there is no jurist who does not use it or can do without it. The *Khaza'in* was printed only once and thereafter no one went after it. Although it has a thousand pages, it is not worth more than the paper used to print it. This man, in spite of being a scholar, wrote the *Asrar al-Shahadah* in which he has totally distorted the event of Karbala, altering it and twisting it out of shape, making it ineffective and inconsequent. His book is full of lies. Now should we keep our silence about him because he was a scholar, a pious man and devoted to Imam (A.S.)? Should not Hajji Nuri give his opinion about his *Asrar al-shahadah*? Of course, he must be subjected to *jarh* and this is the duty of an '*alim*.

We beseech God, the Blessed and the Exalted, to lead our hearts towards the truth, to forgive us the sins which we have committed through *tahrif* and otherwise, to grant us the ability to carry out successfully the duty and mission that we have in this field.

### Notes:

1. Al-Tabrisi, *al-Ihtijaj*, vol. 2, p.457.
2. Al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-anwar*, vol. 7, p. 225; *al-Jami' al-saghir*, vol. 1, p. 3.
3. *Al-Jami' al-saghir*, vol. 1, p. 4.

4. *Bihar al-anwar*, vol. 45, p. 61; *A'lam al-wara*, p. 246; ash-Shaykh al-Mufid, *al-Irshad*, p. 242.

5. In the Late Ayati (r), may God have mercy upon him, we have lost an invaluable asset. Five or six years ago this great man gave a lecture on the method of *tabligh* in one of the monthly sessions of a religious association. It was published in the second volume of *Gufar-e Mah*. There he raised this very issue. He said, "What is this absurd notion that we attribute sickness to Imam Zayn al-Abidin? We have given such an appellation to the Imam that anyone who hears it imagines that the Imam was sick all his life."

6. *Safinat al-Bihar*, vol. 1, p. 63; *Usul al-Kafi*, vol. 1, p. 54.s

## **History and Human Evolution**

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**T**he subject of our discussion is the meaning of evolution in history, or in other words, man's social evolution and progress. Men of science assume two types of evolution for man: one of which is biological evolution, about which you may have read in biology and know that man is considered as the most perfect animal and the last link in the natural evolution of animals. The meaning of biological evolution is clear: it is an evolution that the process of nature has produced without the intervention of man himself and without his asking for it. In this respect there is no difference between man and other animals; since every animal has reached a



stage of evolution by a natural and coercive process. The same process has brought man to the stage that we call him a human being, and consider him a specific kind of species as distinct from other species.

But the historical or social evolution means a new process of evolution in which nature does not play the role it played in man's biological evolution. This evolution is an acquired one, namely, an evolution that man has secured by his own effort, and in every period has transferred it to the next generation through teaching and learning, and not through heredity. The biological evolution has taken place without man's will power and initiative, and has been achieved through a series of laws of heredity. But the social or historical evolution, being acquired by man's effort, has not been handed down from one generation to another, or from zone to zone through heredity, and there is not even a possibility of its being such. It has been accomplished through education, teaching and learning, and primarily through the art of writing. We see that the Qur'an swears in the name of the pen and tools of writing,<sup>1</sup> and addresses the Prophet (S.A.W.) thus: *"Read in the name of your God, Who created man from clotted blood. Read, and your God is the most exalted; He, who taught with the pen".*<sup>2</sup> This means that God taught man how to use the pen; that is, He granted him the power to make progress in his historical and social evolution.

There is no doubt that human society since its origin, that is, since civilization first began to appear, has continuously progressed and evolved. We all know that like the biological evolution, social evolution, too, has been gradual, with one difference, and that is, with the passage of time the rate of evolution has increased in speed; in other words, it has followed a course of acceleration. It has moved on and on and has not been stationary, and the motion, too, has not been a fixed one. A car may move at a fixed speed of a hundred kilometers for several hours; but a speed with an acceleration means a gradual increase of speed in which the speed increases every minute.

But although evolution and progress seem an obvious matter, you may be surprised that there have been learned men who have doubted whether what has happened can be called progress or evolution. One may wonder that there should be any room for doubt in this matter. But the reason why they have expressed doubt about it will be discussed later on. Here, it is sufficient to say that although we do not consider their doubt justified and we believe that human society has continued its course of an all-round evolution and is approaching its final phase, at the same time their doubts are not quite without foundation. Nevertheless, we must clarify the cause for this doubt in order to be able to fully understand the meaning of evolution.

## What is Evolution?

We must first define evolution. Many matters seem at first so obvious as to require no definition. But when one tries to define them, he finds it very hard and is faced with difficulties. I have no intention of quoting all the definitions, which philosophers have given for evolution. There is a fine point in Islamic philosophy, which is subject to argument from the viewpoint of the Qur'an, and that is the difference between "complete" and "perfect". We use the word "complete" as the antonym of "defective", and again we use "perfect" as the antonym of the same word "defective". But does "complete" mean "perfect"? No. There is a verse in the Qur'an, which is related to the question of *Imamah* and *wilayah*. It says: *"Now We made your religion perfect, and completed Our blessings on you and were content for Islam to be your religion."* (Qur'an, 5:3)

This shows that the Qur'an attributes two meanings to "perfection" and "completeness". The blessings were completed from a defective state, and religion was perfected from a defective condition. But before explaining the difference between the two words, let me first explain the difference between evolution and progress, and then return to this matter.

Is progress the same as evolution, and is evolution identical with progress? They happen to have a difference and you may

consider their usage. We sometimes speak of a sickness, which is progressing, but we do not say it is evolving. If an army, which is fighting in a land, occupies a part of it, we say that the army is advancing, but we do not say that it is evolving. Why not? Because there is a sense of exaltation in evolution: evolution is an upward movement, a vertical movement, from a lower level to a higher plane. But progress and advance is always on a horizontal level. When an army has occupied a territory and added some land to its own possessions, we say that it has advanced, which means that it has moved ahead but on the same plane that it had before. Why do we not say that it has evolved? Because, there is the idea of exaltation in evolution. So, when we speak of social evolution, it means man's social exaltation and not just progress. Many things may be considered progress for man and society without being evolution and exaltation for the human society. We say this to show that if some scholars have expressed doubts about such progress' worthiness to be called an evolution, their view is not without foundation. Although we do not confirm their view, yet what they have stated is not entirely pointless. Therefore, there is a difference between evolution on the one hand and progress and development on the other; for progress and development are almost similar in meaning.

But the difference between perfect and complete can be explained in this fashion: If something consists of a number of

parts, such as a building or a car, as long as all the necessary parts do not exist in it, we say that it is imperfect. But when we place the last part in it, then we can say that it is "complete". In comparison, evolution has many phases and stages. When a child is born with some defect in his limbs, we consider him defective; but even when he is born with all his limbs complete, it is still considered defective from another point of view; he must pass through many stages of evolution in his education which are for him a form of exaltation and ascension by degrees and steps. So far our discussion was about the definition of evolution in the social and biological sense. But now we deal with other matters in this connection, the most important of which may be stated in three questions:

1. Has man, in his social life and throughout history, achieved evolution and exaltation?

2. Is human society undergoing evolution and will reach a fully evolved state in the future?

3. If it is undergoing evolution, what is that ideal society, or, as Plato would say, that utopia of man, and what are its peculiarities?

We can understand the course of history up to the present; but what about the future? Should we close our eyes about the future and say that history inevitably moves on an evolutionary course? Is evolution in nature imposed by time? Is the ship of

time voyaging on an evolutionary course without the slightest intervention of man and without any responsibility on his part? Have human beings in the past had no role as beings endowed with free will, freedom of choice and responsibility? Has the role of human beings in the past been secondary and subject to determinism or if there has been no such determining force in the past?

Human beings, by their own free will and choice and their own initiative and planning of their society, have determined an evolutionary course for their society, and have advanced it. This matter of free will and freedom of human beings in the past should not be forgotten. Therefore, a group of men are worthy of praise and admiration, and they are those who had the choice to stand against historical evolution, or deprive it of their support, and prefer their personal welfare to the struggle for the sake of progress. But they chose the other way, and freely, by their own choice, followed the way of evolution, and sacrificed themselves. Similarly other human beings should be reproached and even cursed for posing hindrances in the way of this evolution.

If we do not recognize the future and have no plan for it, and if we pay no attention to our responsibility for making history, we too deserve being reproached by future generations. History is made by man, and not man by history. If we have no plan for the future, and do not realize our responsibility for the

future of history, no one can promise us that this ship will reach its destination automatically. The least that can be said is that it may either go ahead or turn backwards. This matter of ability to advance or reverse the course of events, the idea that there isn't a blind coercive force that drives events ahead, is in Islam, and especially in Shi'ism, a question, which from a sociological viewpoint (as I have explained in my book, **Man and Destiny**), may be considered one of the most sublime of Islamic teachings.

### **The Problem of *Bada'* (Revision)**

In Islam there is an issue called *bada'*<sup>3</sup> (revision). The concept of *bada'* has an apparent meaning which few would regard as acceptable. Some have even criticized the Shi'ah for believing in *bada'*. The meaning of *bada'* is revision in Divine Destiny (*qada'*), meaning that God has not fixed a definite and final form for the course of human history. In other words, God says to man: "You yourselves are in charge of the fulfillment of Divine Destiny, and it is you who can advance, stop or reverse the course of history." There is no blind determinism either on the part of nature or the means of life or from the viewpoint of Divine Destiny, to rule over history. This is one way of looking at man, his history and destiny.

Therefore, as long as we do not understand the direction of evolution and man's ultimate goal, we cannot speak of evolution

and merely state that man is progressing; for then, immediately, the question arises: towards what? If we cannot answer this question, what right do we have to speak of evolution? Don't we study history in order to open a way for the future? If by studying history we get only so far as to allow it to introduce itself without showing a way for the future, what is the use of history? But we see that the Qur'an surveys history in a way to show us the path for the future, and this is how it should be. Therefore, our discussion is related to the past up to the present, and then the future. The question of our duty and responsibility is determinable only when, after becoming familiar with the past, we gain an understanding of the future too.

### **The Evolution of History in the Past**

If we regard history from two points of view, there has been indubitable progress of man, if not an evolution. One of them is in the matter of tools and implements of life. Man has certainly made progress in making tools, and, of course, an amazing progress it has been. Once his tools consisted of unhewn stone, which later on was hewn and polished. Today he has attained the present advanced state of technology, craft and industry. Man has not only advanced in technical skills and achieved stunning progress in production of tools, but he has made such a marvelous progress that if our predecessors and philosophers of a



hundred or two hundred years ago had been told that man would advance so much in a hundred years time, as he has today, no one would have believed it. You may call it whatever you like, either "progress" or "evolution", there can be no doubt that man has made tremendous progress in making tools, and it may be expected to continue in future too, on condition, however, that it is not, checked by a historic catastrophe, a calamity which is again predicted by some men of learning. They consider it probable that man's technical and industrial progress will reach a point when man may destroy himself and all his achievements in science and technology, his books, his learning and civilization and all its vestiges. A new type of human being may appear to start life from the beginning. If no such catastrophe occurs, there is no doubt that the creation of tools may further advance to a stage which may not be imaginable today. This evolution is produced by the evolution of man's experience and his knowledge, for man has made so much progress in his experimental understanding and knowledge of nature that he has been able to conquer nature and turn it into a docile servant. This was one aspect of human progress.

Another aspect of man's evolution (which again may hardly be called "evolution") is in the relations of social life and the structure of society (by "relations" here is not meant human relationships). Human society has gradually been transformed

from a simple one into a complex structure. In other words, in the same way as he has advanced in technical and industrial matters from the simple cars of yesterday to the present day aircrafts and sophisticated spacecrafts, in the same way as in natural evolution a unicellular organism is so simple as compared with an animal like man in bodily structure, human society, too, has changed from a simple to an extremely complex structure.

Some have defined evolution as a process involving two stages: at first, there is an accumulation, that is, a multiplication of parts followed by division, characterized by a movement from homogeneity towards heterogeneity, or, in other words, movement towards organization between parts and organs interconnected by a unifying relationship. For example, we know that in the process of fertilization, a cell which is formed by the combination of male sperm and female ovum has a simple form at first; then it begins the process of division (accumulation); one cell divides into two, the two into four, the four into eight, the eight into sixteen, and this division goes on. But it is only a question of quantity until a stage is reached when there takes place another form of division; this is, one part becomes the nervous system, another emerges as the heart and system of blood circulation, and so on, and all these organs are interrelated forming an organized unity which is the human body. In this respect, human society, too, has progressed, whether you may

choose to call it 'evolution' or not. That is, the structure of human society has changed from a simple state into something complex. The structure of primitive and tribal societies was very simple. Someone was the chief of a tribe consisting of a number of people, and the chief divided the tasks between them, and these tasks were few in number. But you see that with the progress of science and technology, such division of work has become complicated because there are more tasks and more people to perform them. Compare the existing variety of jobs, tasks, professions and crafts of modern day with those of the societies of a hundred years ago. Or look at the degree of specialization at the administrative and scientific levels. In the past, a man was able to master all the sciences of his own time. He could become an Aristotle or an Ibn Sina. But now the system of education has undergone such subdivisions, that we have hundreds of the like of Aristotle and Ibn Sina, each a specialist in his own field, who are not the least acquainted with other branches of science and quite unaware of even their existence in the world. This is a characteristic of our time, a quality that removes uniformity and homogeneity from among human beings and replaces it with differences and distinctions. For, as man creates work, work too builds up man. As a result, although all are human beings living in one society, but they seem to possess different natures, since everyone is dealing with a task, which is unknown to another

who is engaged in another task. Every one of them seems to live in a different world of his own. The result is that human beings vary from one another. If we speak of progress or evolution in connection with society and its organization and division of labour, skills and talents, again the structure of human society has changed from a simple into a complex and extremely entangled one.

You may, from these remarks, realize that if things go on in this fashion, there is a danger of the creation of so many differences that the unity of mankind will be threatened; that is, human beings will resemble one another only in appearance, but their mental, spiritual, emotional and educational structures will be totally different from one another; and this is a great danger for humanity. That is why it is said that technological progress has alienated man from himself, and made him a stranger to himself. It has turned man into a creature styled and tailored to the needs of his job and profession, and destroyed human unity. This is in itself a serious problem. In any case, we may say that from the viewpoint of social structure too, societies have evolved in the past. However, here, in addition to the problem of power and domination over nature and besides the structure of human society and social organizations, there are a number of other problems which are related to human nature, and that is the relationship of individuals with one another.

## Human Relationships

Has man made progress in the quality of relationships of human beings with one another in the same way as he has made progress in the creation of tools, and in the complexity of social structure? If he has, then we may call it evolution and exaltation. Have human beings progressed in the sense of co-operation? Does a human being of today feel more co-operative towards others than in the past? Has he made a proportionate advance in the sense of responsibility towards other human beings? Has man's exploitation of other human beings been really effaced? Or is it that only its form has been altered and that it has increased in degree? Has man's aggression against the rights of others diminished? Have human relations improved in proportion to the advances made in building tools and with the complexity of social structure? Or have these problems remained the same as before? Or there may be some who claim that not only no progress has been made in this connection, but also there has even been retrogression? In other words, can it be said in general that human values, and everything that is the criterion of the humanity of man, have advanced proportionately?

Different views have been expressed in this connection; some cynically deny it totally that man has made any progress whatsoever in this respect, for, they say, if the criterion of

progress is welfare and happiness, we may hardly call it progress. For example, even in the case of tools, it is doubted whether they have provided man with welfare. As an example, speed is one of the things, which have greatly advanced as exhibited by the telephone, airplane, and other such things. But can this improvement in speed be called progress when measured by the criterion of human welfare? Or, since speed is a means, it has produced comfort in one respect, in other respects it has deprived man of welfare: it carries a good man promptly to his destination, but it also carries a wicked man as quickly to his goal and as promptly in his evil purpose. A sound and honest man has found stronger hands and quicker legs. A wicked man, too, has the same advantages. These means have made possible the transfer of a criminal from one part of the world to another part in a few hours, to kill thousands or even millions of people at once. What, then, is the final conclusion? Though I am not in favour of this cynicism, yet I wish to explain why some has expressed it. For example, is the progress in medicine a true progress? In appearance, it is, for I see that when a child suffers from diphtheria, right drugs and proper medical treatment are readily available. This is progress. But some people like Alexis Carl who measure these things with the criterion of humanity, believe that medicine is gradually weakening human species. They say: In the past, human beings had resistance against diseases; the weak

were destroyed and the strong remained alive, and this made successive generations stronger and resistant to diseases, and also prevented the unnecessary increase of population. But now, medicine is artificially preserving weak persons who otherwise would have perished and were really condemned to death by nature. Therefore, the successive generations are not fit to survive, and so every generation becomes weaker than its predecessor. A child born in the seventh month of pregnancy is by the law of nature condemned to death; but now medicine, with its progress and means, preserves this baby. But what will become of the next generation? Moreover, there is the question of over-population. It happens that those who are fitter for the improvement of the human race are destroyed and those who are not competent to bring about this improvement somehow manage to survive. This is the reason for doubt in this matter.

### **Another Example**

In connection with the mass media, one may think it wonderful to sit in a corner and at the right moment hear the news in which he is interested. But remember that this same thing creates so much anxiety and worry for human beings; for, in many matters, it is more advisable for man not to hear such news. For instance, in the past the people who lived in Shiraz<sup>4</sup> were unaware of the flood which overran Ghuchan,<sup>5</sup> drowning so many

people and making others homeless. But now they learn of it immediately and feel sad and anxious. There are thousands of such unpleasant happenings occurring in various parts of the world.

It was from the viewpoint of human welfare, and welfare as a criterion that learned men has doubted whether to regard speed as a measure of progress and evolution or not. However, we have nothing to do with these problems, for as we believe, there is ultimately an evolution and all these difficulties may be overcome, a subject that we will discuss later. Thus, in the question of human relationships, we cannot say that any progress or evolution has taken place, or, even if it has occurred, it is not proportionate to the progress made in making tools and to the growth in social organization.

### **The Relation of Man with Himself**

Another question is the relation of man with himself, which is termed 'ethics'. If we do not say that all the happiness of man lies in the establishment of a good relationship with oneself - and we do not say so because it would be an exaggeration - yet we may say that if the means of man's happiness are compared with one another to find a percentage of role of every factor, a greater part of human happiness would be found to lie in the relation of man with himself, or with his "self": the relationship of man with



his animal aspect. For, man, in spite of his humanness and the human values inherent in his nature, is also an animal; that is, he is an animal on which humanity has been imposed. In other words, he is an animal, which, by the side of his animality, also possesses humanity.

The question arises here whether the humanity of man is subordinate to his animal side, or if his animality is subservient to his humanity. The Qur'an says:

***He who purifies the soul indeed attains deliverance, and one who corrupts it certainly fails (91:9-10)***

The problem here is of self-purification, which means not being captivated by greed and concupiscence of the self, and not being in the clutches of one's animal characteristics. As long as man has not evolved ethically and has not attained internal emancipation from his own animality, it is not possible for him to establish good relations with other human beings. Good human relations can come into existence when man liberates himself from the captivity of other human beings, and is also able to abstain from subjugating other human beings to him.

So far we have discussed four points:

1. The relation of man with nature, in which he has made progress.

2. The relation of man with his society, which has progressed from the viewpoint of social structure and organization.

3. The relation of man with other human beings, and the quality of his relations with other members of his kind, which depends again on his spirituality and is linked with the substance of his humanity. In this matter there is doubt as to whether he has made progress or not: that his progress in this sphere has not been on a par with other aspects is beyond doubt; the real question is whether he has made any progress at all.

4. The relation of man with himself, which is the subject of ethics.

### **The Role of Prophets and Religion in the Historical Evolution**

Has man of today overcome his animality more than his ancestors in the past, and have the higher human values been realized in his existence? Or, has the quality of human existence been better in the past? The role of the prophets in the historical evolution, their role in the past and in the future, becomes clear in this connection. Here we can discover the role of religion in the past and thereby find out its role in the future, and on the basis of scientific and sociological evidence, we can guess whether man requires religion in future for his evolution or not; because, the survival or annihilation of every thing is subject to its being able

to fulfill human need. This principle has been stated by the Qur'an and is affirmed by science. The Qur'an says:

*As for the scum, it vanishes as jetsam, and what profits men abides in the earth ... (13: 17)*

There is a parable, which I have repeatedly used in my lectures, and that is the parable of flood and the foam on water. It says that the foam disappears quickly and the water remains. Right and wrong are compared to water and foam, and what is beneficial remains, and what is useless disappears.

The question whether religion will survive in the future is related to its role in human evolution, that is, in the evolution of his essence, his spirituality and humanity and the evolution of good relation of man with himself and with other human beings something which cannot be replaced by anything else, either now or in future.

The question, therefore, is that, either, in the future, human society will dissolve and mankind will be effaced from the face of earth as a result of collective suicide, or human society will attain its true destiny, which is an all-round evolution (evolution in his relation with nature, evolution in awareness, in power, in liberty, in emotions and sentiments and other kinds of human feelings). We believe that this evolution will be achieved, a belief which, in the first place, we have obtained under the inspiration of our religious teachings.

In a lecture entitled "*The Significance of Occult Aids in Human Life*" I have stated the point that this optimism concerning the future of humanity and human evolution and man's deliverance from reaching a dead-end, cannot be provided by anything except religion. It is the role of religion in human life, which alone guarantees the evolution in the human essence of man's being.

### Notes:

1. The Qur'an 96:1

2. *Ibid.*, 96:2,3

3. *Bada'* literally means "appearance". Its meaning in the case of a human being is this: the appearance of an idea about some action, which he did not have previously, in such a way that it influences his intention in regard to that action. That is, something happens which alters his understanding and will in regard to that action. Obviously such alteration and change in intention is due to human ignorance and limitation of knowledge and understanding. *Bada'* in this sense is impossible for God, for revision and alteration in Divine will is not account of imperfections common to man.

4. A city in south Iran.

5. A town in Iran.